

Screen



Haunted places, cinema spaces

Love and friendship in romantic comedy

Ozu Yasujiro's pictures of the past

History and melodrama in Chinese cinema

The trauma debate II

Subscription & order information

Screen (ISSN 0036-9543) is published quarterly in March, June, September, December by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK. Annual subscription price for institutions of UK and Europe £94, USA and Rest of the World US\$170. Personal subscriptions £44 for UK and Europe and US\$74 USA and Rest of the World, and for Students and Unemployed UK and Europe £27 USA and Rest of the World US\$48. The current plus two back volumes are available from Oxford University Press. Previous volumes can be obtained from the Periodicals Service Company, 11 Main Street, Germantown, NY 12526 USA. Tel +1(518)537 4700 Fax +1(518)537 5899. Screen is distributed by Mercury International, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, New Jersey, NJ 07001 USA. Periodical postage paid at Newark, New Jersey, USA and additional entry points.

US POSTMASTER: send address changes to Screen, c/o Mercury International, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, New Jersey, NJ 07001, USA.

Payment is required with all orders and subscriptions are accepted and entered by the volume(s). Payment may be made by the following methods: Cheque (made payable to Oxford University Press), National Girobank (Account 500 1056), Credit Card (Mastercard, Visa, American Express), UNESCO Coupons, Bankers Barclays Bank plc, PO Box 333, Oxford, Code 20-65-18, Account 00715654. Individual rates apply only when copies are sent to a private address and are paid for by personal cheque or credit card.

Please send orders and requests for sample copies to Journals Subscriptions Department, Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP. Tel +44(0)1865 267907 Fax +44(0)1865 267485 Email jnl.orders@oup.co.uk

© 2003 The John Logie Baird Centre. No article may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system without the permission in writing of the editors and the publisher. Screen incorporates Screen Education.

ISSN 0036-9543

Typeset by Wyvern 21 Ltd
Printed by Bell and Bain Ltd

editors

John Caughie
Simon Frith
Annette Kuhn
Karen Lury
Jackie Stacey
Sarah Street

reports and debates editor

Jackie Stacey

reviews editors

John Caughie
Karen Lury

website editor

Sarah Street

editorial assistant

Caroline Beven

editorial advisory board

William Boddy (USA)
Giuliana Bruno (Italy/USA)
Charlotte Brunsdon (UK)
Alison Butler (UK)
Erica Carter (UK)
Barbara Creed (Australia)
Sean Cubitt (New Zealand)
Alan Durant (UK)
Dimitris Eleftheriotis (UK)
John Fletcher (UK)
Christine Geraghty (UK)
Claudia Gorbman (USA)
Catherine Grant (UK)
Norman King (UK)
Myra Macdonald (UK)
Laura Marks (USA)
Alastair Phillips (UK)
Murray Smith (UK)
Julian Stringer (UK)
Will Straw (Canada)
Ravi Vasudevan (India)
Ginette Vincendeau (UK)

editorial address

The Editors, Screen
Gilmorehill Centre
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ
screen@arts.gla.ac.uk

internet sites:

<http://www.Screen.arts.gla.ac.uk>
<http://www.oup.co.uk/Screen>

44:2 Summer 2003

issue editor

Jackie Stacey

CHARLES R. ACLAND: Haunted places: Montréal's Rue Ste Catherine and its cinema spaces 133

ALASTAIR PHILLIPS: Pictures of the past in the present: modernity, femininity and stardom in the postwar films of Ozu Yasujiro 154

CELESTINO DELEYTO: Between friends: love and friendship in contemporary Hollywood romantic comedy 167

NING MA: Signs of angst and hope: history and melodrama in Chinese fifth-generation cinema 183

dossier

The trauma debate II

PETER THOMAS: Victimhood and violence. *Memento* and trauma theory 200

DANIEL HUMPHREY: Authorship, history and the dialectic of trauma. Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* 208

KAREN RANDELL: Masking the horror of trauma: the hysterical body of Lon Chaney 216

MICHAEL HAMMOND: Laughter during wartime: comedy and the language of trauma in British cinema regulation 1917 222

report

ADRIAN HORN: Imagination: Visual Culture and Identity since the 1940s 229

reviews

JOHN FULLERTON: Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser (eds), *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era*; Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence, *Writing Himself into History. Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences*; Jane M. Gaines, *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* 235

JAMES LYONS: Gregory A. Waller (ed.), *Moviegoing in America: a Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition*; Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood* 240

CATHERINE FOWLER: Dimitris Eleftherotis, *Popular Cinemas of Europe – Texts, Contexts and Frameworks* 246

cover illustration

Cinéma de Paris Rue Ste Catherine,
Montréal 2000 (photo Michael
Longford)

Screen
is planning a
special issue on
Michael Powell

2005 is the centenary of Michael Powell's birth.
Screen invites articles on themes inspired and
influenced by his work.

The deadline for submissions is 31 January 2004.

Please submit articles, marked
'Michael Powell special issue' to

Caroline Beven
Screen
Gilmorehill Centre, University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ
t 0141 330 5035 • f 0141 330 3515
screen@arts.gla.ac.uk
www.screen.arts.gla.ac.uk

Haunted places: Montréal's Rue Ste Catherine and its cinema spaces

CHARLES R. ACLAND

From our vantage point, here at the beginning of the second century of cinema, it is evident that journeys to motion picture theatres have long been an ordinary element of contemporary life. Cinemagoing may not capture the entirety of one's engagement with cinema culture, as a wide variety of audiovisual forms (videotape, DVDs, television, CDs, websites, books and magazines) contribute to an apparatus of cinematic practice and knowledge, but all of these do not dilute the specificity of cinemagoing, which involves a particular set of actions. In fact, as media theorists we need to place cinemagoing in the context of an array of engagements with audiovisual culture that are scattered across a range of media, locations and situations. Doing so is not to privilege cinemagoing over other sites and activities, but rather to take account of the fact that it is one practice among many.

Part of cinemagoing's specificity is the way in which it is folded into other practices of sociability. It is frequently an occasion for meeting people, for conversation and for organizing an evening or an afternoon. Being a cinemagoer is to exercise a well-delineated organization of knowledge, including degrees of familiarity with what is playing, what will be opening, where films are showing, what the 'better' cinemas are, how one gets to them, how long it takes to get there, where companions will be met before or after, and so on. This is knowledge about sites of exhibition, about the current cinema, and about cities.

Motion pictures introduced into the popular universe more than streams of moving images, they also introduced types of theatres.

- 1 Several histories have traced the shifting relations among film form, theatre space, and cinematic technologies. See for instance, John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Douglas Gomery *Shared Pleasures: a History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992). Other histories have focused on industrial structure. See for instance Thomas Guback, 'The evolution of the motion picture theatre business in the 1980s', *Journal of Communication*, vol 37 no 2 (1987) pp 60–77; Douglas Gomery, 'US film exhibition: the formation of a big business' in Tino Ballo (ed.) *The American Film Industry*, revised edition (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp 218–28; Janet Wasko *Hollywood in the Age of Information* (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1994).
- 2 On this point Anne Friedberg documents the analogous relations between shopping and cinema, describing 'the new aesthetic of reception found in "moviegoing" as "mobilized visuality"' Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1993), p 3.

spectatorial conditions and related activities.¹ Moreover, on site, the public film experience includes other forms of media consumption, including magazines, video displays, trailers for coming attractions, advertising slide shows, music between screenings, video games and, of course, food. To understand the practice of cinemagoing, media consumption and social activity beyond film, though articulated at a designated film site, must be considered. The term *cinemagoing* usefully captures the physical mobility involved, the necessary negotiation of community space, the process of consumer selection, and the multiple activities that one engages in during, before and after a film performance. In the present context, this mobility is circumscribed by the fact that films are most frequently seen away from the cinema.²

While the act of cinemagoing often leads us to an encounter with an international culture shared by commercial venues in many countries, the practice has a local manifestation. Cinemagoing is not some free-floating cloud of cultural life, but a structured set of procedures that inform where, when and how people congregate for public film spectatorship. The very material locations of cinemas, and the paths people take to them, propel the spatial and temporal shaping of cinemagoing as well as of the city itself. Simply put, cinemagoing can only be exercised in distinct places. Consequently, those locations seen as special *zones of cinemagoing*, that is groups of physically proximate cinemas, stand out as having an extraordinary role in the structuring of the practice for that home context. More exactly, the Marxist concept of uneven development might be adopted to characterize the rising special qualities of some zones, produced by an agreement about investment capital and producing an assemblage of appended social relations. Such a concentration reminds us equally of the relative absence of comparable activity and investment elsewhere. We might think of the power of cities, or parts of a city, to exert a cultural dominance over a vast geographical terrain, a power that operates both materially and in the realm of the imagination. For instance, it is entirely likely that those who may not make the trip to one of those special zones, for whom it is not an everyday experience, harbour nonetheless a sense of its activity.

Cinemas and zones of cinematic life produce, and are the product of, traces of historical and economic forces. As sites that invite people into a vector of cultural participation, they are mnemonic devices, begging for stories to be told and for recollections to be conjured. In this way, they mix personal and communal experience with the broader operations of capital. Cinemas are showcases for technology and community manifestation, as well as memorable and inconsequential social occasions. With the material practice of cinemagoing as a unique form of expression and experience in mind, I want to build upon Martin Allor's important contribution to a

3 Martin Allor, 'Locating cultural activity: the "Main" as chronotope and heterotopia', *Topia* vol. 1 (Spring 1997) pp. 42–54

4 Ibid. p. 51

5 For more elaborated histories of this concentration, and of Montréal cinemas in general, see Yvan Lamonde and Pierre-François Hébert, *Le cinéma au Québec: Essai de statistique historique (1896 à nos jours)* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1981); Scott Mackenzie, *A Screen of One's Own: Québécois Cinema, National Identity and the Alternative Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming); Jean-Marc Larue, 'Le cinéma des premiers temps à Montréal et l'institution du théâtre', *Cinéma*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1995) pp. 119–31; Pierre Veronneau, *Montréal, ville de cinéma* (Montréal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1992); Germain Lacasse, *Histoires de "scopes": Le cinéma au Québec* (Montréal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1988)

6 Patricia Thompson (ed.), *Film Canada Yearbook 1998* (Toronto: Cine-Communications, 1998)

7 For this, I refer the reader to Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884–1938* (Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993). This invaluable resource provided much of the verification of historical detail that follows in particular dates of openings and closings of theatres

spatial examination of cultural practice.³ His essay, 'Locating cultural activity: the "Main" as chronotope and heterotopia', advances an approach to the study of the juncture between audience, space and everyday life. The essay is primarily an epistemological examination of the intersecting relations of global/local and discourse/practice. Allor does this by examining Montréal's rue St Laurent, also known as the Main, as a domain of cultural activity, a place and a conjuncture. Allor views 'the Main as a liminal zone of discursive and geographic space which is productive of a variable range of cultural practices', and which reproduces places and articulated social relations.⁴

In that same city, rue Ste Catherine has been crucial to a history of popular entertainment, first with its concentration of vaudeville stages, then motion picture theatres – and, for a while, both.⁵ One cannot help but remark upon the continued abundance of theatres, both English- and French-language. Using the inventory available in *Film Canada Yearbook 1998*, 19.8% of Québec's screens are located in Montréal proper (a figure that excludes suburban communities and their numerous multiplexes), and a full 13.4% are along, or just off, rue Ste Catherine.⁶ On the basis of this observation, it seems warranted to consider the construction of determinate spatial and temporal contexts for spectatorship along this street. It means that inhabitants and visitors alike have travelled the pathways to and from Ste Catherine's offerings again and again over many years. These pathways construct a rich and multitered edifice of experiences and habits, infusing the area with the local procedures and textures of popular entertainment.

As a toehold against the gush of capital's expediency, active battles to maintain varied records of a city's past are urgently required. Preservationist programmes can provide such a voice, especially when they appeal to, and seek to represent, the lived relations of cultural communities. However, the documentation of that special zone of cinemagoing which follows does not necessarily further the romance for the bourgeois splendour of the movie palace. This is because when cultural theory becomes a vehicle for yearning for the past, it is in danger of abandoning its conjunctural critique, taking up instead a project of ahistorical mythologization. Lament – and there is much to lament in the general selling out of city space – need not slide into the fantasy of nostalgia. Additionally, this is not an architectural study, invested in tracing formal allusions in spatial detailing and celebrating innovative 'spatial authors'.⁷ Nor does this study secretly deliver an agenda for 'urban renewal', a euphemistic phrase for an often suspect enterprise.

What follows is an inquiry into the fragments of urban cultural existence. I specify the space (rue Ste Catherine) through a focus upon a set of actions (cinemagoing), which are articulated to an audiovisual form (primarily, but not exclusively, theatrically released

- 8 M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge MA MIT Press, 1994)
- 9 Walter Benjamin *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge MA Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 14–15
- 10 Siegfried Kracauer *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Levin (Cambridge MA Harvard University Press 1995) p. 75
- 11 For examples of work that largely investigates cities in cinema, see David B. Clarke *The Cinematic City* (New York, NY Routledge, 1997) Alternatively other work especially inspired by Benjamin and Kracauer inverts this to treat the speedy varying shock of the visual experience of cities as camera-like and filmic. See Anke Gleber *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flânerie, Literature and Film in Weimar Culture* (Princeton, NJ Princeton University Press, 1999) An exception to these dominant approaches is Tony Fitzmaurice and Mark Shiel (eds), *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (Oxford Blackwell 2000) Another key recent innovation has been work that furthers the study of the relation between memory and cinema practice, for example Annette Kuhn *Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London IB Tauris 2002)
- 12 An interesting example of this work is found in Douglas Bailie *Cinemas in the city: Edmonton from the nickelodeon to the multiplex* *Prairie Forum* vol. 21 no. 2 (1996) pp. 239–62. In direct contrast to my focus upon surface expression is the rich and wonderful historical study by André-G. Bourassa and Jean-Marc Larrue *Les nuits de la Main: Cents ans de spectacles sur le boulevard Saint-Laurent (1891–1991)* (Montréal VLB éditeur 1993)

motion pictures) It is an interrogation into a ‘liminal zone of discursive and geographic space’, though such zones are by no means immutable and constant. Revisiting parts of a city for specific purposes over the years, and the economic activity that accompanies and drives such revisiting, creates a panoply of developments, renovations and rewritings of that space. Accordingly, it produces changing sites and material boundaries for one brand of cultural practice. It equally produces various types of debris and residual elements from yesterday’s arrangement, leaving multiple artefacts and stories for a population to negotiate. Such residual media, actions, buildings, ornaments, narratives and signs assure the living and fluctuating nature of a city, and the manifold experiences and understandings that filter into the popular realm. Christine Boyer reminds us of the ‘architectural residue’ that visibly builds up layers of a city’s political and aesthetic life.⁸ These layers are not entombed and concealed, and no simplistic preservationist drive can fully fossilize their meaning and impact. As Walter Benjamin explored in *The Arcades Project*, this residue, this *surface* expression, transforms urban markets and entertainments into a phantasmagoria, rendering the forces of history kaleidoscopic in their effects.⁹ By implication, taking account of the fluctuations of urbanity necessitates paying attention to exteriority. On this point, Siegfried Kracauer proclaimed that historical change might best be ascertained from ‘inconspicuous surface-level expressions’¹⁰ The liminality of residue, and the wild landscape it establishes, emerges in the following chronicle of the surface of cinematic life, whether cinemas present or markings of cinemas past. As will become evident, these fragments of cultural life are shot through with the *spatial and temporal divisions of leisure*.

Little previous work in film studies has done this, choosing instead to find textual parallels to city life.¹¹ Some research has documented the changes in cinema venues through time.¹² The present approach draws out the visible and affective consequences of capital investment in cinemas and the ensuing negotiation of urban space by people. Cinemas change both the material and imaginative life of a city in general by, for instance, introducing crowded gatherings where previously there were none. Motion picture theatres have particular functions in cinema culture, especially concerning the ‘newness’ of the film texts presented. One primary quality of the theatrical release is its pull, its role as bait and lure for urban movement. And physical movement for the new film commodity is a centre around which other forms of consumption circulate. Thus, documenting the entire event of cinemagoing starts from the premiss that the public film experience does not begin and end with an auditorium’s change in lighting. Understanding and detailing cinemagoing means unpacking a trajectory guided by routines, regiments, memories, expectations, promises and rules. Only in the most atrociously simplistic models of cultural life could cinemagoing

become a one-dimensional activity of moving through the community to arrive at the passive event of viewing a film. Cinemagoing ignites social designs requiring the deployment of city knowledge, including the ways in which different locations are navigated, knowledge of parking, bus routes and metro stations, and even which end of the train will be nearest to the metro exits. It is as much about an activation of expertise in city life as it is about the process of filmic subjectification. Cinemagoers are subjects not just of cinema but of the city, the suburb and the town.

The location (a zone of cinemas) and its appended practice (cinemagoing) specify a conjunctural site of social relations. The chronicle below reveals variations in those concentrated venues and their associated dispositions, as announced on the surface of these public places. It becomes evident that embedded in these locations are the traces of previous arrangements of cinematic life and the residual elements of a street's history. Ultimately, one can see how the spatial and temporal divisions of leisure rest securely in neither the heavy hand of the urban planner nor the creative whims of an individual mind, but in an articulation of the material and experiential fragments of cultural practice.

Rue Ste Catherine has been a vital location in the imagining of Montréal and Québec. As the main thoroughfare for the central business district, it includes the clutter of discount stores, the sparkle of the newest shopping centres, and the monumentality of corporate office towers. Traversing the wealthy town of Westmount from rue Claremont, through the downtown, past the Pont Jacques-Cartier, on to just past rue Viau, the street is a trajectory linking East/West, Franco/Anglo/Allo, Oui/Non. It has been part of Montréal's status as a 'City of Tomorrow' for generations, from the empire-building force emanating from the furrier district to the downtown campus life around Université de Québec à Montréal, at Berri, the intended location of a massive high-tech public library. This street is a dominant venue for the playing out of Montréal's sense of cosmopolitan life. Simultaneously lifting the city to an international notion of the contemporary and pulling such notions into the community milieu, Ste Catherine has fed a feeling of being in time with the modern age. Probably nothing is more emblematic of this than the 'underground city', a series of shopping complexes, metro stations, government buildings and cultural centres linked by tunnels and concourses that few touristic accounts of the city fail to mention. The underground city has been presented as the best of the built environment, with its controlled and monitored conditions of work and leisure. This fortress Montréal, seemingly both mediaeval and futuristic, is a grand fallout shelter for the great Canadian apocalyptic threat – the weather.

13 Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity* (New York, NY: Penguin 1982)

The realization of an imaginary future is only one reading and experience of the downtown. Rue Ste Catherine displays the Faustian bargain of modernity, as detailed by Marshall Berman.¹³ It is difficult to pass the scars left by failed development projects – for instance the gaping hole at the corner of Guy which sat for years before becoming a parking lot – or the vacant storefronts – like the abandoned location for the music video station MusicPlus at Ste Elisabeth – and not be reminded of the uneasy tension between construction and destruction that marks the most prominent and visible of city locations.

Like many, I have travelled along portions of this street, and its adjoining streets, on hundreds, maybe thousands, of times. But I have walked it in a single trip only three times, and only in the context of writing this essay: three trips covering the majority of Ste Catherine, in April 1998, May 2000 and May 2002. I saw this research journey specifically as a linkage between cinemas, a connect-the-dots line cutting through the downtown of the city.

Atwater	Guy	Peel	Metcalf	McGill	Bleury	St Laurent	St Denis
1	2 3	5	7	8	11 13 15		17 18 19
rue Ste Catherine							
	4	6	9	10	12 14	16	20 21
							22

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Atwater – E/CO | 9 Loews – E/FP | 17 Quartier Latin – F/CO |
| 2 AMC Pepsi Forum – E | 10 Cinéma de Paris – E | 18 CinéRobothèque – E&F |
| 3 Seville – E | 11 Eaton Centre – E/FP | 19 Cinémathèque Québécoise – F |
| 4 Faubourg – E/CO | 12 Palace – E/FP | 20 Video Erotica |
| 5 York – E | 13 Centreville – E/CO | 21 Le Bern – F/CO |
| 6 Crystal Palace/NYC | 14 Le Parisien – F/FP | 22 Ouimetoscope – F |
| 7 Egyptien – E/CO | 15 Imperial – E | |
| 8 Paramount – E/FP | 16 Desjardins – F/CO | |

E = English language F = French language CO = Cineplex Odeon chain FP = Famous Players chain

14 For an aesthetically inspiring documentation of rue Ste Catherine, including some of its cinemas, see Gabor Szilasi, *Photographies/Photographs* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1997)

While not a complete catalogue of past cinemas on this route, the inventory is defined by a certain visibility, and may be thought of as *a collection of signs of cinematic life*. Emphasizing the movement along the street, the photographic documentation is closer to the snapshot than to the more carefully composed interpretive portrayal.¹⁴ The result is that the collection of surfaces portrays the markings of temporality for one area of the city. The images here, which are but a representative selection of the total documentation, provide evidence of contrasting rates of change surrounding sites as much as of the sites themselves. At some locations little alteration is apparent over the four-year period, and at others the change is massive. Particularly devastating has been Cineplex Odeon's mass closures of

its downtown multiplexes in 2000 and 2001. Concentrating upon the look of the street meant avoiding reliance upon information that might not be visually apparent to identify sites, though background research has been provided in the discussion. Therefore, cinemas thoroughly transformed prior to the first outing in 1998 and not announcing themselves as such were not included in this inventory. Even with this 'presentist' intent, it becomes clear that the surface of the city's cinema culture nonetheless expresses a historical regard. The street front look of cinematic life, and the related call to certain genres of public cinematic practice, can be arranged into nine overlapping categories.

The cinema concealed

Place Alexis Nihon is a shopping and office complex that externally provided no indication of the three Cineplex Odeon screens inside, a multiplex called the Atwater. Such shopping mall cinemas are noted for their turning away from the street (figure 1). Stashed on the lower, metro level of the mall, and opened in 1967, the Atwater screens were informally known in their later years as those that featured new African-American films, most likely due to its relative proximity to Petite Bourgone. Such concealment behind and below the street front equally rendered invisible the shutting of that multiplex in 2001 (figure 2).

Further down Ste Catherine one found two other similar shopping-centre multiplexes. Since 1976, the cinemas of Complex Desjardins (1 Place Desjardins, figure 3) sat neatly at a hub of corporate,



Fig. 1 Place Alexis Nihon, 2000
(Photo: Michael Longford,
hereafter ML)



Fig. 2 Place Alexis Nihon, 2002
(Photo: Charles Acland,
hereafter CA)



Fig. 3 Complex Desjardins, 1998
(CA)

government and cultural activity, and its subsequent closing in 2000 was not apparent to exterior passers-by (figure 4). The interconnected Place des Arts, Musée d'art contemporaine, the shopping centre and corporate offices of Place Desjardins, and the federal government offices of Complex Guy Favreau establish a spatial continuity between those civic and business sectors. Tucked away just as Place Alexis Nihon's cinemas were, these four Cineplex Odeon screens were a French-language slice of the current cinema. On the top floor of a shopping centre, totally hidden from the street, are the six Famous Players Eaton Centre screens (705 Ste Catherine Ouest, figures 5 and 6). As with each of these inward-turning theatres, the



Fig. 4 Complex Desjardins, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 5 Eaton Centre, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 6 Eaton Centre, 2002 (CA)

cinema typically boasted a placeless, internationalist architecture. This quietyens the enunciation of particularity in spatial design, thus amplifying the travelling culture of the film itself, as it lands, supposedly effortlessly, in any number of locations. However, the bid for the magical appearance and disappearance of film events can never completely efface the machinations of advance capital upon which this sleight of hand operates. At the very least, the actual trip to and from the cinema puts one right back into the flow of street traffic and the neighbourhood. The reverie of placelessness is ultimately doomed. Accordingly, the Eaton Centre screens, opening in 1990, have been refurbished and brightened up, and their auditoriums have been given not just numbers but names that allude to cinemas of an earlier era: the Rivoli, the Strand, and so on. This move from the placeless, concealed screen to the named one leads to the next category.

Mall opulence

The Faubourg's elaborate food court, speciality food stores, retail outlets and Concordia University facilities construct a lively location. Its fairly conventional urban market atmosphere has not diminished its status as a downtown destination. It displays the aesthetics of gentrification from the mid 1980s, with its signs of petty prestige, especially relating to gourmet food. Cineplex Odeon's Le Faubourg theatre (1616 Ste Catherine Ouest, figures 7 and 8) consisted of four



Fig. 7 Faubourg, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 8 Faubourg, 2002 (CA)

15 Cineplex readies Montreal fourplex', *Variety*, 26 November 1986, p. 7

16 Douglas Gomery, 'Building a movie theatre giant: the rise of Cineplex Odeon', in Tino Balio (ed.), *Hollywood in the Age of Television* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 377

screens on the lower-level shopping concourse. Opened in 1986, its decor was a contemporary take on art deco, described in *Variety* as 'reminiscent of the splendour of the movie palaces of the 1920s and 1930s'.¹⁵ With the inclusion of original artwork, these cinemas were taken as a sign that the tiny and placeless multiplex cinemas were about to be a thing of the past. As Douglas Gomery put it, Cineplex Odeon shifted in the mid 1980s from 'drab "cookie-cutter" multiplexes' to 'vast complexes of whimsical, postmodern "picture palaces"'.¹⁶ This momentary spark of cinematic opulence did not register upon the market's facade. The Faubourg cinemas closed in 2001, and the space currently operates as classrooms for Concordia University.



Fig. 9 Mount Royal, 1998 (CA)



Fig. 10 Mount Royal, 2002 (CA)

The more upscale Mount Royal (1455 rue Peel, figures 9 and 10) transformed a former hotel into high-end boutiques, retail chains and condominiums. Its lower-level, three-screen Cineplex Odeon Egyptien theatre, opened in 1987, was another early shift towards the renewed appearance of luxury, also fated to be part of the wave of Cineplex Odeon cinemas darkened early in 2001. Again, allusions to movie palaces of the interwar period were evident in the Egyptien's crypt-like entrance. It was a kitsch tomb from Ancient Egypt, complete with decorative pillars, sphinxes, and hieroglyphic markings, in which signs of opulence simultaneously were signs of cinematic nostalgia. This theme cinema connoted not only a former civilization, but theme cinemas of the past. The referent was movie palaces, not Egypt, though its cheap detailing did not come close to a reproduction, or even a simulation, of the original 1920s and 1930s versions. This cinema offered an organization of signs of inauthenticity. The mall opulence of these cinemas and their trappings of luxury seem minor when compared to the more recent appearance of our next category.

The megaplex

Returning to our starting point, next door to Alexis Nihon is the old Montréal Forum, home of the Montréal Canadiens hockey team until their move a few kilometres east to the Molson Centre in 1996. The

17 Gayle MacDonald, 'The vast picture show', *The Globe and Mail*, 17 January 1998, pp. B1, B5

Forum was to be one of the beachheads for the Canadian incursion of AMC, one of the largest US theatre chains (figures 11, 12 and 13).¹⁷ It was converted into twenty-two cinemas, finally opening in



Fig. 11 Forum, 1998 (CA)



Fig. 12 AMC Pepsi Forum, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 13 AMC Pepsi Forum, 2002 (CA)

2001 under the name AMC Pepsi Forum. In an effort to memorialize the building's esteemed hockey heritage, the new Forum has several plaques embedded in the sidewalk at one entrance and has centre ice symbolically reproduced in the lobby. There is a light and multiscreen show that plays across the vast atrium for both paying and non-paying customers, presenting images of local hockey history (a production partially funded by the government of Québec). These flourishes coexist with a display documenting the conversion of the building, the themes of adjoining restaurants and bars, and the ample corporate branding of AMC and Pepsi.

The AMC theatre is an example of the most visible of recent investments by chains – the megaplex. Such large theatres have been characterized as 'destination sites', with the inclusion of high-tech video arcades, digital sound, cafes and bars, merchandising outlets, party rooms, elaborate video displays of coming attractions in the lobby, extra leg room between rows of seats, and expanded concessions menus. Other chains have their own flagship megaplexes along this street. The Famous Players chain converted the Simpson's department store building, built in 1929 but vacant since 1989 (figure 14), into a thirteen-screen megaplex, the Paramount, opened in 1999 (figure 15).¹⁸ This is part of Famous Players' longstanding dominance from rue Metcalfe to rue Bleury. In 1997, Cineplex Odeon opened Quartier Latin (350 rue Emery), just north of the corner of rue Ste Catherine and rue St Denis, with seventeen screens (figures 16 and 17).

The term 'destination site' circulates among retailers and

18 Konrad Yakabuski, 'A phoenix to rise on Ste Catherine', *The Globe and Mail*, 29 October 1997, p. A2



Fig. 14 Simpson's, 1998 (CA)



Fig. 15 Paramount, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 16 Quartier Latin, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 17 Quartier Latin, 2002 (CA)

19 For an elaboration on the cultural and economic forces behind the changing practices of cinemagoing associated the megaplex, see Charles R. Acland, *Movies, Multiplexes and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming), and 'Cinemagoing and the rise of the megaplex', *Television and New Media*, vol. 1, no. 4 (2000), pp. 375-402

developers as a way of describing the distinctive drawing power of these and comparable venues: that is, places to which people plan to go. Megaplexes and various 'location-based entertainment' complexes are associated with the special trip, collapsing quasi-tourist notions of departure with ordinary amusements and activities. With the cinema as a destination in its own right, the actual movie need not be chosen beforehand, as one encounters a slate of possibilities on arrival at the chosen site. Importantly, many of the extra activities offered at megaplexes are an explicit attempt to keep patrons on-site longer, as exhibitors try to claw back money that traditionally goes to neighbouring bars and restaurants before and after the film, making megaplexes far more than sites of film projection. Industry publications talk about the 'improvement' and 'upgrading' of the cinemagoing experience, a characterization that frequently invokes the movie palace as a source of inspiration. In a comparable inflation of cinema grandeur, and after years of concealment in corners of shopping centres, these multiplex cinemas have swollen up to become malls themselves. Suitably, megaplexes return the cinema to stand-alone status and return the marquees to the street.¹⁹

The street front educational venue

A few blocks off Ste Catherine, and near the Quartier Latin megaplex, the Cinéma theque Québécoise (335 de Maisonneuve Est, figure 18) and National Film Board of Canada's (NFB) distribution experiment, the CinéRobothèque (1564 St Denis, figure 19), offer research resources and screening facilities. The former acts as a repertory cinema, a research library and a location for festival screenings. It also houses museum-like displays of cinema technology. The latter is an attempt to address the NFB's longstanding problem of finding an audience for its productions by constructing its own venue in a crowded downtown area. Sitting in individual screening units, the CinéRobothèque patron watches a robotic arm retrieve and set up one's viewing preferences selected from a computerized database. This facility parallels other NFB



Fig. 18 Cinéma theque Québécoise, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 19 CinéRobothèque, 2000 (ML)

experiments, from the travelling projection circuits of the 1940s to today's web distribution of films. Both venues advance a formation of national cultural citizenship as that of the student or scholar, and attempt to secure national cinematic heritage as distinct from popular commercial sites.

The movie palace

Still operating is the Imperial (1432 Bleury, figures 20 and 21), from 1917, formerly part of the Famous Players chain, now under independent ownership and housing the offices of the Montréal World Film Festival. Presenting 'independent' and festival films, and



Fig. 20 Imperial, 1998 (CA)



Fig. 21 Imperial, 2002 (CA)

occasionally used for feature premieres, it is the last operating and intact movie palace along this route, subtly made recognizable by the ornamentation visible beside the newer marquee. Just as the design of the movie palaces evoked the earlier, more prestigious cultural forms of the theatrical stage to elevate cinemagoing, here too past cultural expressions function as signs of contemporary tastefulness. The reified ambience of the old venue bestows the film festival or premiere with a desired solemnity and seriousness. Despite exterior modifications, and other interior renovations, the Imperial is the last 'intact' screen from that era along this route. Others are now amputated palaces, our next category.

The rationalized palace

Where megaplexes and opulent mall cinemas allude to movie palaces, the luxury cinemas themselves have metamorphosed. Famous Players' Loews theatre (954 rue Ste Catherine Ouest, figure 22), in contrast to the Egyptian's reproduction, is a severed palace. Originally opening in 1917 as a vaudeville theatre, then the largest in Canada with over 3000 seats, it was chopped into five smaller auditoriums in 1976.²⁰ Interestingly, this rationalization of a giant theatre allowed details of the former grandeur to peek through in each auditorium and in the lobby, with painted ceilings and ornate trim partially visible throughout; even the name continued to refer to an earlier period. Closed at the end of 1999 (figure 23), it became another brand of 'entertainment destination' – a Club Med (figure 24).

²⁰ Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces*, p. 75



Fig. 22 Loews, 1996 (CA)



Fig. 23 Loews, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 24 Club Med, 2002 (CA)

A few blocks east, one comes to the Parisien (480 rue Ste Catherine Ouest, figures 25 and 26), the westernmost francophone cinema along this route. Built as the Princess in 1917, it became the Parisien in the 1950s and then converted into a fiveplex in the 1970s.²¹ It has been part of Famous Players' concentration in the central part of this street, run by its subsidiary Cinémas Unis. Famous Players rationalized the Palace (698 rue Ste Catherine Ouest, figure 27), built in 1921, into a six-screen multiplex in 1981.²² Unlike the Loews, these cinemas were hollowed out, leaving no indication



Fig. 25 Le Parisien, 1996 (CA)



Fig. 26 Parisien, 2002 (CA)



Fig. 27 Palace, 1998 (CA)

of their previous status. In contrast to current fascination with the movie palace, the architect who oversaw the gutting of the Palace took the ornamentation as "bad copy, a perversion" of Classical design,²³ and hence did not hesitate to replace it with an internationalist vision of the contemporary.

The discount cinema

Though closed in 2000 to become an entertainment destination site called Metaphoria (figure 28), in its later years the Palace was a second-run cinema. Priced to compete with home video releases, discount cinemas announce the temporal dimension of the exchange value of the current cinema. Commercial cinemas count upon the newness and freshness of their offerings, with an increasing reliance upon the first few weeks after an opening for the bulk of box-office returns. Discount cinemas operate in relation to the ageing of theatrical releases and their transformation into other commodity



Fig. 28 Metaphoria, 2002 (CA)



Fig. 29 Palace, 2000 (ML)

forms. The Palace itself is an excellent figure of spatial transformation, having moved from its life as an ornate theatre to a rationalized palace to a discount cinema to an entertainment destination. With this last incarnation, we see a return of the earlier facade as renovations remove later additions (figure 29). Until 2000, there was also the nine-screen Cineplex Odeon Centre-ville, (2001 Université), and until 1998, further East, there was Le Berri (1280 rue St Denis, figures 30, 31 and 32), Cineplex Odeon's second-run



Fig. 30 Le Berri, 1998 (CA)



Fig. 31 Le Berri, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 32 Le Berri, 2002 (CA)

house on the corner of St Denis, consisting of five screens. Inexpensive public cinema competing temporally with video also includes the next strikingly resilient category.

The pornographic arcade

Crystal Palace, near the corner of Peel, tenders ongoing pornographic entertainment (figure 33). The name echoes a famed vaudeville stage



Fig. 33 Crystal Palace, 1998 (CA)



Fig. 34 Video Erotica, 1998 (CA)

on rue St Laurent, itself an echo of the famed London pavilion of the mid nineteenth century. But even these obscure references were gone by 2000, when the establishment took up a new name, one that is a more recognizable sign of the metropolitan modern: NYC. Such venues signal the continuation of the nickelodeons and penny arcades of a century ago with their intimate spectatorial conditions. The presence of the cine-porn venue reminds us of an easily neglected aspect of public cinematic life, one that continues to survive the convenience and privacy of home video by offering immediate access to its continuous shows. Other impulse porn sites are found just east of St Laurent (figure 34), with the gay porn venues located east of St Hubert, all presuming a certain sexualized masculine public.

Signs without cinematic practice

Some lost cinematic venues still display their origins, as with the return of the Palace's facade. Comparable to the Berri's ageing marquee, the slowly fading evidence of the repertory cinema Cinéma de Paris, dark since 1995, lingered as a semi-concealed entrance and a sign high above the street beside Chicken Charlie's banner (figures 35 and 36). A site that formerly had been the Black Orchid nightclub,²⁴ Cinéma de Paris's signs were eventually swallowed by a large clothing store (figure 37).

24 Ibid., p. 49



Fig. 35 Cinéma de Paris, 1998 (CA)



Fig. 36 Cinéma de Paris, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 37 Terra, 2002 (CA)

And signs without cinematic practice include the crumbling opulence of previous eras. The York, dating from 1938, was a material reminder of that much romanticized era of theatres (figure 38). The absence of sanctioned economic life since 1997 did not mean that cultural life disappeared as well. One purpose in the afterlife of ageing landmarks is to provide the atmosphere of city life. Before its complete demolition, the York had been transformed



Fig. 38 York, 1998 (CA)



Fig. 39 York, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 40 Parking Lot, 2002 (CA)

25 Ibid., p. 132, Mark Ruwedel, 'Marquee picture portfolio, the theaters of Montréal', *Marquee*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1986), p. 20

26 Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: a History of Canadian Cinema, 1895–1939* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), pp. 24–5

into an informal art project, tagged repeatedly (figures 39 and 40), and used as a location for the film *Waking the Dead* (Keith Gordon, 1999). Closed and abandoned theatres serve as backdrops to dramas that will travel and play in other contexts, and can be configured as signs of 'downtown'.

The slow decline of the Seville (2153–2159 Ste Catherine Ouest), a 1929 theatre, closed in 1984,²⁵ provides a visible sign of urban decay (figure 41). Itself a location for the film *Street Smart* (Jerry Schatzberg, 1987), the Seville was being reconstructed as a shopping centre, though the date for completion is long past. The marquee has been demolished and a nearby laundry has appropriated the name (figure 42). Now hollowed out, and for a time rather casually policed, people without homes and living on the street sought shelter there (figure 43). Yet, even in this stripped-down state, with each



Fig. 41 Seville, 1998 (CA)



Fig. 42 Seville, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 43 Seville, 2000 (ML)

layer of its cinematic life shorn away, ghostly reminders of the screen remain (figure 44).

A fitting place to end is the Ouimetoscope, established in 1906, becoming a luxury motion picture theatre in 1907 (figure 45).²⁶ Seen as years ahead of its time, the lavish Ouimetoscope was a failure. In recent years, it has been demoted to serving as a billboard for theatrical events taking place elsewhere in the city (figure 46). The only indication of its earlier incarnation is a plaque commemorating the site of the first movie palace in North America (figure 47). The plaque draws the location, regardless of its dwindling relation to cinematic practice, towards the street-front educational venues noted



Fig. 44 Seville, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 45 Ouimetoscope, 2000 (ML)



Fig. 46 Ouimetoscope, 2002 (CA)

Fig. 47 Ouimetoscope Plaque,
2000 (ML)



above. Battling the shifts in the surface of cinematic life, such memorialization wishes to root the past in a visible and legible present. The plaque is a bid for permanence that acts, paradoxically, to announce the change that continues beyond its brass borders.

Prefiguring both the emergence and the demise of the majesty of the movie palace, the Ouimetoscope provides a prescient anecdote about the ongoing mutability of spectatorial conditions. Yet, as these three research journeys have captured, the movie palace – or more precisely, the allusion to past splendour – did not disappear. Instead, it continues to reside as a historical marker of cultural prestige built into contemporary cinemas and as a measure of decay. In the end, one resilient dimension of bourgeois cultural trappings is its expression though receding forms. As Allor writes, drawing upon the work of Doreen Massey, we need to see ‘locales as always already in a state of imbrication with distant social relations’ and to relativize ‘the links between the present politics of a place and its past(s) which works to undercut any unilateral claims to a simple identity or authentic moment for a locale’.²⁷ An apparent example of this imbrication, surfaces display a connotative weight, alluding both to a cinema future and a cinema past. Additionally, one can observe the extensions of the zones they once designated as they mutate into new kinds of cinemas and into other kinds of places. Hotels become shopping centres and cinemas; cinemas become classrooms, retail outlets and empty spaces; hockey arenas and department stores become megaplexes; rationalized theatres become entertainment destinations; vacated screens become film locations, billboards and shelter. These alterations and reiterations of space and practice are all part of the sedimentation of layers of social and economic relations.

In the three research trips and the subsequent organization of nine categories of surface life, I have been quite flexible with my method. While wanting to note only the public display of cinematic signs, I could not resist making reference to a mix of historical background and remembrances. Admittedly, this arose from a desire to fill out the detail and to offer the reader some of the locations’ colour and contour. Still, I did not document sites that only a specialized

27 Allor, ‘Locating cultural activity’,
p. 44

knowledge of film history would recognize, nor did I record the limitless range of intertextual appeals, whether from posters at videotape rental outlets or star-related commodities in shop windows. These methodological decisions can never capture the many ways in which sites are salient in the memories of cinemagoing for other travellers. How many continue to note the converted entrances to the Guy and the Eve, two former porn cinemas that were no longer recognizable as such in 1998? Though the limited time span of this essay is voluntarily tied to a photographic record, memories can burst up wildly and are not so neatly delineated. Locations act as deposits of artefacts, however broken up, to which a sense of temporal existence becomes attached. Public surfaces especially become riddled with the experiences and recollections of people's cultural engagements, hence building their own historicity. As Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard wrote, 'Gestures are the true archives of the city', which effectively 'remake the urban landscape everyday'²⁸

²⁸ Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, 'Ghosts in the city' in Michel de Certeau Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life Volume 2 Living and Cooking*, trans Timothy J Tomasik (Minneapolis, MN University of Minnesota Press 1998), p 141

Cinemas are sites of return visits and therefore are increasingly familiar to their patrons and to passers-by. A level of competency develops with regard to the route: knowing how to get there, where to meet people, where to sneak in. A relationship between location and use emerges, one that is the very basis of civic life. As Samuel Kinser puts it, 'Gathering spots and points of dispersion – grand plazas, civic buildings and porticos, shops and markets in competitive array – are essential to this community of joining and unjoining, of debates and disputes, of contracts and law suits'.²⁹ Let me propose a simple exercise to demonstrate this: imagine the number of buildings, condominium towers, corporate offices, apartment buildings, bars, hotels and other establishments that one passes frequently, if not daily, and yet never enters. One has no invitation to explore beyond even the most familiar of these exteriors. Indeed, they are nothing *but* exteriors. For the topic in hand, some of the above nine categories may only ever be 'exteriors' for some people. Cinemas are also zones of exclusion. What are the characteristics and varieties of the cinema invitation? And, after Bourdieu, what dispositions do each call into being? As the preceding mapping reveals, sites are circumscribed in terms of language, sexuality, prestige, pricing and the newness of film texts. The invitation to any of the nine dimensions of cinema culture is selective and temporally designated. Nonetheless, the very presence of film spaces assures continuity between the street and the audiovisual, between the edifice as a sign of cinema and the proximate experiences of movement through city streets.

²⁹ Samuel Kinser 'Everyday ordinary', *Diacritics*, vol 22 no 2 (1992), p 72

Of course, the sort of city agency I am invoking to understand cinemagoing encompasses other practices. From dining to clubbing, shopping to working, theatregoing to concertgoing, there are a myriad of quasi-organized manners and intentions with which to attack the city. But taking groups of cinemas as the unit of analysis

draws our attention to the articulation of actions with spaces that are associated with particular manifestations of audiovisual culture. Further, such a focus highlights the way in which one vector of cinema culture alters the look of the city through the construction and destruction of theatres, propelled by entrepreneurs and current ideas about spectatorship. As anchors to areas of a city, cinemas help to establish mercurial zones of cultural life that do not, and cannot, exist elsewhere. With every renovation and reconstruction, the flow of human traffic and a multiplicity of actions and familiarities intensifies or eases. In the end, it is entirely possible to have a kind of command of the city, but to be without cultural and economic capital . . . or to be a stranger in a city you own, literally.

In 'Walking in the city,' Michel de Certeau begins above the city with the panoramic view.³⁰ But he moves from the heights of New York's World Trade Centre to the street below. The pleasure of seeing the whole – a powerful, capturing gaze – becomes the more intimate horizon of the single block, the intersection, and the storefront. As de Certeau writes, 'The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below"' ³¹ The gaze that surveys is one of appraisal, organization, and census. Such a view is analogous to the blueprint, as it is a gaze possessed by those few powerful individuals who design, plan and build. Enjoying the panoramic sweep of the view from above is the experience of sharing a moment in the arrangement of the city, even if this is a condition of interloping for most of us. In a way, the overview is the imaginary construction of the city as a whole, as a unity, and as coherent. Down below, however, one sees and experiences the city as immediate layers and planes. To concretize the distinction, think of the evidence accessed by the grid-like map of rue Ste Catherine used in this essay as distinct from the closeup confrontation with individual sites provided by the photographs. De Certeau's essay abandons the lofty place for ground-level analysis. He investigates wandering, an activity that can only occur at the feet of a city's towers. What he finds is an everyday tactic to manoeuvre within the structures of life and location. In walking, he sees a freeing up of possibility, hence a path to human agency, and if not resistance, at least some ruses and 'countless tiny deportations'.³²

On this point, Edward Soja strikes a note of caution against the 'over privileging of what has been called, often with reference to the work of Michel de Certeau, the "view from below" – studies of the local, the body, the streetscape, psycho-geographies of intimacy, erotic subjectivities, the microworlds of everyday life – at the expense of understanding the structuring of the city as a whole, the more macroview of urbanism, the political economy of the urban process'.³³ In this critique, Soja highlights the too easy deployment of the *flâneur* as a metaphoric and literal image of 'the street-wandering free agent of everyday life'.³⁴ Instead, the gentle *flâneur*'s idleness is

³⁰ Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the city', in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1984) pp. 91–110)

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93

³² *Ibid.* p. 103

³³ Edward Soja, 'Six discourses on the postmetropolis' in Sallie Westwood and John Williams (eds), *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memory* (New York: NY: Routledge 1997) p. 21

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21

equally one of social position, after all, who truly wanders blindly, breaking the city into fleeting contemplations, and under what circumstances? As a caveat to the tendency to champion the petty subversion and the everyday tactics of those who are just 'making do', we would do well to remember that the powerful walk too, just a little faster and in a wider radius

To view ambulation as a subversive form neglects the various specific occasions and reasons for manoeuvre and travel. One must inquire, what material forces propel and channel movement through a spatial context? In this respect, cinemagoing is *flânerie* only if it helps us 'recognize our own consumerist mode of being-in-the-world', as Susan Buck-Morss puts it.³⁵ The deep social and cultural engagement acknowledged here is made more pronounced by Benjamin's companion term, the *badaud*, or the 'gawker', which Tom Gunning describes as having 'lost the *flâneur*'s detachment'.³⁶ Lived skills, competencies and familiarities can be expressions and experiences of loss and fixation, as well as the operation of analytical gazes. Put differently, cinemagoing is an activity that has been mapped, comes with an itinerary, and encourages connections to a variety of consumption activities. It is goal-oriented, and guided by financial resources, the navigation of the trip and the temporal grid of performance schedules. As such it is both a set of gestures and of limits.

The cinemagoer is the mobile subject of both the city and cinema. The flow of cultural and economic capital establishes pathways and grooves through a city, ones that are reconceptualized with every variance in the temporal and spatial forms of media culture. The material effects include the changing look and shape of streets. The draw of the cinema venue, memories of that draw, and the pathways people negotiate spark and mould human mobility. And as with the welling up of previous cultural relations captured in the photographs, this cinemagoing subject is automatically spiked with a historical consciousness, however everyday and ordinary this consciousness might be. As Benjamin writes, 'The street conducts the *flâneur* into a vanished time'.³⁷ Becoming a subject of the city means becoming a subject of capital's movement and of the traces of that movement. And move it does. So what does it mean to live with the perpetual light, and occasionally heavy, impacts of capital's motility? What is the significance of the quotidian expectation of change, and affective awareness of the rate of that change? For, if there is a linking point across the first cinematic century, and back into the nineteenth century with other media, it is every generation's belief that it alone has endured more change than any other. Every generation, however defined and conceived, sees itself as the culmination of progress, leaving its members to manage unprecedented disorientation, speed, noise, upheaval, new technologies, new institutions, vanishing social ties and strange geographies. Cohorts see their challenge as

³⁵ Susan Buck-Morss 'The *flâneur*: the sandwichman and the whore: the politics of loitering', *New German Critique*, vol. 39 (Fall 1986) pp. 104–5

³⁶ Tom Gunning 'From the kaleidoscope to the X-ray: urban spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin and *Traffic in Souls* (1913)' *Wide Angle*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1997), p. 29

³⁷ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* p. 416

historically unique, and as a new, unparalleled battle against the tightening grip of anomie. This, however, is just one way of thinking about and remembering the contemporary, not an unqualified fact, and as such should be viewed critically. As Elizabeth Wilson rightly reminds us, 'The notion of change is central to the experience of modern and contemporary urban life', suggesting 'the pace of change, rather than effacing the past, may even intensify our memory of what is no longer there'.³⁸ Echoes of the past and signs of the future are compressed. Among the strategies and tactics struggled over in a habitual fashion, we must place at the forefront the view that history – *including cinema history* – should be conceived as neither loss, nostalgia nor apology, but as transformation, layering, and reiteration. Or, as de Certeau puts it, 'Haunted places are the only ones people can live in'.³⁹

³⁸ Elizabeth Wilson 'Looking backwards, nostalgia and the city' in Sallie Westwood and John Williams (eds) *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memory* (New York: NY: Routledge, 1997) p. 129

³⁹ De Certeau 'Walking in the city' p. 108

Versions of this research were presented at McGill University (Montreal), Carleton University (Ottawa), 'Cinéma et des restes urbaine' (Montréal) and the Canadian Communication Association (Edmonton). On each occasion, the ensuing discussion greatly aided the growth of the work, and I thank those perceptive participants. Michael Longford (Concordia University) deserves special recognition for his expert talents in photography, used during 2000's journey. Support for this research came from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Pictures of the past in the present: modernity, femininity and stardom in the postwar films of Ozu Yasujiro

ALASTAIR PHILLIPS

1 Plot Synopsis Elderly parents Shukichi and Tomi leave their youngest daughter at home in the coastal town of Onomichi to visit their son Koichi and daughter Shige in Tokyo. They find their children preoccupied and too busy to take much of an interest in the visitors. It is Noriko, the widow of their dead son Shoji, who offers the couple genuine hospitality. After returning early from a hastily arranged visit to a noisy spa resort, the parents find themselves with no place to stay in the big city. Tomi stays with Noriko and Shukichi goes out drinking with old friends. Eventually, they return to Onomichi but shortly afterwards Tomi dies. The children rush to the parental home but all except Noriko soon hurry back to Tokyo. Before Noriko leaves, Shukichi thanks her and urges her to remarry. He gives her his dead wife's watch.

I have always been struck by the emotionally charged scene in Ozu Yasujiro's *Tokyo monogatari/Tokyo Story* (1953)¹ in which the visiting grandmother, played by Higashiyama Chieko, takes her young grandson for a walk outside his house. Her visit will likely be the last time that she will see the boy, for she has to return to the distant town of Onomichi by the sea. The grandson plays while the grandmother wonders aloud about her old age and what will become of the young boy. The scene might well embody all the sentimental appeal of the classical Zen notion of *mono no aware* (loosely translated as the notion of the fleeting transience of all things), but it also seems to me to present another issue, one that is more firmly located in the specific instance of the year of the film's release. It would have been well known to the audience of the time that the world the grandson was going to inherit would be vastly different to that known by his grandmother. The reconstruction of the Japanese nation following defeat at the end of World War II and the end of the US occupation meant that the traditions of the grandmother's generation were dissolving. If these traditions were perhaps not being replaced, they were certainly being renegotiated by a new interpretation of a nationally specific modernity. In other words, through a nuanced demonstration of feminine emotion, this scene articulates a sense of transition which must have had a bearing not just on the 1950s audience's feelings about themselves and their own mortality, but also on their broader feelings about their relationship to the nation as a whole.

In this essay, I shall turn away from the well-trodden path of a number of western critics who have primarily seen the need to place Ozu in formalistic terms by arguing that his films look and feel significantly different from the western canon.² Instead, I want to highlight the fact that his work falls almost entirely within the genre of the Japanese *gendai-geki* – the contemporary drama. By choosing not to focus on any distinctive employment of timeless Japanese aesthetic strategies, I shall propose that the director's postwar films be understood as an engagement with the depiction of contemporaneous social change and its specific effect on gendered cultural *milieux* and social relationships. I shall suggest that they vividly enacted a particular contestation between tradition and progress in Japan's immediate postwar social order at a time when the concept of a new formulation of nationhood was intertwined with a concurrent and inevitable sense of loss due to change. By looking especially at questions of femininity and stardom, I shall argue that the central issues of modernity and national identity, which ran as a continuous theme in these films, also need to be examined in relation to a number of gender-related social, cultural, political and economic contexts such as new patterns of consumption and work practice, shifts in the family structure and different perceptions of womanhood in Japanese society. I shall be asking, therefore, whether these films were popular as much for the particular roles their female stars played, and where these performances were placed, as for any intrinsic sense of aesthetic uniqueness. In other words, was it through the specific interaction of female stardom and the representation of female social space that the contestation between the seemingly irreconcilable elements of tradition and transition was actually articulated?

As a subset of the *gendai geki*, that is the *shomin geki* or home-life drama, films like *Bunshun/Late Spring* (1949),³ *Bakushu/Early Summer* (1951)⁴ and *Tokyo Story* clearly dealt with questions of continuity, tradition, timelessness, memory and change from a strong female perspective. Ozu's postwar work for the Shochiku studios at Ofuna, under the managing guidance of Kido Shiro, achieved a reputation among a popular, especially female, audience for humanistic, everyday fictions that evoked a carefully constructed mix of social criticism, comedy and melodrama. These films generally had a distinctive emotional timbre which would deal with a commonly recognizable social reality but imbue it with what was critically termed a 'positive warm-hearted'⁵ approval. The themes of memory and tradition were given an extra dimension by being placed in a mode of representation which itself emphasized a sort of filmic heritage. Ozu and his regular team of fellow filmmakers, that included the scriptwriter Noda Kogo, the set designer Hamada Tatsuo and the cinematographer Atsuta Yuharu, used the flavour of the Shochiku genre and the repertoire of Shochiku stars and character

2 Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell 'Space and narrative in the films of Ozu', *Screen*, vol. 17 no. 2 (1976), pp. 41–75, Edward Branigan 'The space of *Equinox Flower*', *Screen*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1976), pp. 74–105, Noel Burch, *To the Distant Observer* (London: Scholar Press, 1979), significant sections of David Bordwell's groundbreaking *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1988). For subsequent useful revisionary discussion of Ozu's aesthetics and their distinctive relation to Japanese cinematic practice, see, for example, Scott Nygren, 'Reconsidering modernism: Japanese film and the postmodern context', *Wide Angle*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1989), pp. 6–15, Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, 'Melodrama postmodernism and Japanese cinema', in Wimal Dissanayake (ed.), *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 101–26.

3 Plot Synopsis Noriko lives with her father in Kamakura, the coastal ex-capital about ninety minutes from Tokyo. She appears content to remain single and care for her much-loved father, despite encouragement from some of her female ex-classmates to find a suitable husband. Only Aya, a modern city girl, sympathizes with her choice. Worried that Noriko will find herself alone in later years, her father and aunt concoct a scheme to persuade her to marry. Noriko's father himself pretends to be planning to remarry and tells his daughter that in time she will find happiness with her chosen suitor. They go on a final trip together to Kyoto prior to the wedding. After the ceremony, the father confesses his duplicity to Aya and returns home to an empty house.

4 Plot Synopsis The Mamiya family is visited by the elderly brother of the grandfather Noriko, a still unmarried daughter works for

Satake, who suggests the family investigate the marital prospects of a successful middle-aged businessman he knows. In the meantime Noriko's elder brother Koichi assigns their neighbour Yabe, a friend of Noriko, to a hospital post in distant Akita. One evening Yabe's mother blurts out that she had always hoped that Yabe would marry Noriko. Abruptly, Noriko agrees to do so. The Mamiyas object and pressure Noriko to change her mind but she remains steadfast. Without her vital contribution to the household income, the family dissolves and the film ends with the grandparents living in the country with the elderly uncle who had visited them previously.

5 Kido Shiro, quoted in Bordwell *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* p. 20.

6 There are two further points to be briefly made about Shochiku and national identity. Firstly, all Shochiku films bore the house logo of Mount Fuji, the sacred symbol of the Japanese nation. Secondly, as Darrell William Davies has demonstrated, Kido Shiro actively collaborated with the military authorities in the prewar period, especially in relation to the 1939 Film Law which 'mobilized' the film industry as a cog in the vast government propaganda machine. Apparently it was Kido Shiro's idea to adapt the *Kulturfilm* from Nazi Germany. Cinemas were compelled to show *Bunka eiga* (culture films) under the Film Law. See Darrell William Davis, *Picturing Japaneseness* (New York: NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 64–68.

7 Joanne Bernardi, *Writing in Light: the Silent Scenario and the Japanese Pure Film Movement* (Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 2001), pp. 52–66.

8 See Donald Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001), pp. 117–45. For more on the important work of Naruse Mikio from a feminist perspective, see Freda Freiburg

actors to produce a recognizable product that had its own particular currency for the national audience.⁶ This currency would have circulated in the film magazines and among the expectations of the filmgoer prior to and during the viewing of a new release. Even today, for most Japanese people it is impossible to think of Ozu without also thinking of the intertextual qualities of Hara Setsuko's daughter-figure and the mothers, aunts and sisters played by the likes of Sugimara Haruko, Tanaka Kinuyo and Miyake Kuniko.

This dynamic interrelationship between Japan's vibrant popular film culture and the mass female audience has a long tradition dating from the early stages of the nation's industrialization at the turn of the century, when new patterns of urban production and consumption emerged in relation to working women. If it is true that there were still significant debates about the relevance and desirability of actually having female performers onscreen well into the teens, as Joanne Bernardi has amply demonstrated in her pioneering research into early Japanese cinema,⁷ one may nonetheless note the proliferation of new classes of Japanese female consumers and spectators in the burgeoning city economies of offices and department stores, coffee shops and textile factories. These women developed highly specific and sophisticated tastes with regards to performers and actors. It was no accident, then, that the place of women in Japanese culture was central to debates over the nature of direction of Japan's modernity throughout the century, and that Ozu's contemporary dramas, especially of the postwar years, spoke directly to these concerns. This is not to say that Ozu's dramas were exclusive examples of this phenomenon. A detailed archaeology of the multiple relationships between female stardom and popular feminine genre cinema of the period has yet to be undertaken, but one might mention, for instance, such contemporaneous films and actresses as Takamine Hideko in Kinoshita Keisuke's *Nyuyon no hitomi/Twenty Four Eyes* (1954), Tanaka Kinuyo in Goshō Heinsuke's *Entotsu no mueru basho/Where Chimneys are Seen* (1953) and Hara Setsuko again in Naruse Mikio's *Meshu/Repast* (1951), the latter being based on the popular women's writer Hayashi Fumiko.⁸

In order to address the question of what modernity in the Japanese instance might mean, I want to take Stuart Hall's definition of modernity as a multiplicity of processes which are realized in political, economic, social and cultural terms over time,⁹ but qualify it on two accounts, especially in relation to the specific question of femininity, spatial representation and the work of Ozu. Firstly, the transformation did not run concurrently along some single streamlined continuum. It is important to discern different durations to the modulations of change to acknowledge that modernity was never fixed or ideally located at some particular juncture. In Japan, as elsewhere, these streams clearly played on the consciousness of

The materialist ethic of Miko Naruse URL <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/02/20/naruse.html> [01 01 03]
 Catherine Russell, 'Miko Naruse and the Japanese women's film', *Asian Cinema* vol 10 no 1 (1998), pp 120–25
 Catherine Russell, 'From women's writing to women's films in 1950s Japan', *Hayashi Fumiko and Naruse Miko Asian Journal of Communication*, vol 11 no 2 (2001), pp 101–20
 For an innovative study of the specific interrelationship between Tanaka Kinuyo and Mizoguchi Kenji see Chika Kinoshita, 'Choreography of desire: analysing Kinuyo Tanaka's acting in Mizoguchi's films', URL <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr1201/ckfr13a.htm> [01 01 03]

9 See Stuart Hall 'Introduction' in Stuart Hall and Bram Grieben (eds) *Formations of Modernity* (Cambridge Polity, Blackwell Open University, 1992), pp 1–16

10 H D Harootunian, 'Visible discourses/invisible ideologies' in Miyoshi and Harootunian (eds), *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham NC Duke University Press) p 68

11 Naoki Sakai, 'Modernity and its critique' in Miyoshi and Harootunian (eds), *Postmodernism and Japan* p 116

the nation according to different interrelated variables such as regional location, age and especially gender. Secondly, and very importantly, Japanese modernity was never equal to western modernity, despite the fact that, for the most part, modernity has meant what Harry Harootunian has termed 'the West, its science, and the devastating effects it had inflicted on the face of traditional social life' ¹⁰

It is important to unpick the thinking behind this second point. When the Tokugawa shogunate, which had ruled Japan in isolation for over two centuries, was overthrown in 1868, much of the apparatus of western civilization was adopted by the incoming oligarchy of the Meiji Restoration. This is not the same, however, as saying that with an enhanced material infrastructure of trains, machinery, communications media and so on, Japan modernized and thus 'westernized' at the same time. Indeed, if one examines Japan's recent past prior to World War II, during which Ozu had produced mass entertainments from the 1920s, one can see that modernity's meaning for Japan was deeply contested. In the first instance, modernization, which I will define as the material impetus or apparatus of modernity, meant catching up with the West and achieving an infrastructure and sense of up-to-dateness which stood on a par with the stature of such countries as the UK and Germany. This not only had material significance, it also had geopolitical relevance to Japanese regional interests. The fact that many Japanese thinkers were also acutely aware that Japan's modernity, its sense of itself in relation to the modern, was constantly being mediated by a comparison to the West had several consequences. In particular, it led to a widespread fear of the loss of the intrinsic spirituality of the people, a dilution of the cultural essence of the Japanese folk (*minzoku*). What developed, as a result, was a bureaucratic, state-based conception of the roots and branches of the traditional folk village (*mura*) being transferred onto a holistic model of the nation as a family overseen by the divine Emperor. According to Naoki Sakai, pre-World War II Japan actually had to 'modernize and adapt things from the West in order to resist it' ¹¹ Japanese modernity in the postwar period therefore entailed an ostensible severance with this past. Under the orders of the commanders of the Occupation, which lasted until 1952, the feudalistic worship of the Emperor under the guise of state-military ideology had to be renounced. A new, more authentic, nation was to appear, constructed on the basis of a democratized version of subjectivity. Importantly, women were for the first time given suffrage, and the populace as a whole were encouraged to see themselves as victims of an unjust and corrupt leadership which had led them to take the wrong path on the route to a modern conception of the state. But secondly, and in a way contradictorily, there also had to be a sense of continuation of the modern in that there was no going back to tradition and the absence

12 Masao Muruyama, quoted in Carol Gluck, 'The past in the present' in Andrew Gordon (ed) *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1993) p. 79

13 Gluck 'The past in the present', p. 79

of the material benefits of progress. The Japanese writer Maruyama Masao has talked about the 'double image'¹² of the postwar period in relation to these two ideas. A 'new' nation had to be constructed which could reconcile what had gone on before with the need to recover prestige in the international arena. Economically, this reconstruction came to mean the term *kodo seicho* (high growth) and the appearance of the myth of a *shin chukan taishu shakai* (new middle-class society). Carol Gluck thus argues convincingly that 'the alleged break in 1945 in fact posited a continuity not between pre-war fascism and post-war democracy, but between modernisation in its first phase and the chance the second time to get the modern right'.¹³

Over the period in which Ozu made his cycle of postwar dramas, Japan witnessed an extraordinary surge of industrialization and productive capacity. This was accompanied by the drift of the populace to the major urban centres such as Osaka and Tokyo, and an enhanced and much expanded material infrastructure. New patterns of consumption emerged during the 1950s. The upsurge in magazine publishing, the advent of television, the growth of rail and billboard advertising all heralded an enhanced visual culture which was connected to the growth in disposable income and awareness of new *seikatsu* (lifestyle or standard of living). All of these changes and their distinctive social and emotional consequences were vividly apparent in the dramatic narratives of Ozu's female-centred *gendai-geki*. The pace of industrialization was observed along with the development of commodification and the new consumer culture. Trains and stations were incorporated into the narratives to suggest new kinds of movement and relationships between spaces and citizens. The conflict between the national tradition of the family unit and individual female desire was played out in the feminized domestic space of the home drama. The new subjectivity posited by democracy was given emphasis by the reluctance of the younger, especially female, generation to follow prescribed norms. The city as a world of changing leisure and work patterns was observed. Many characters have actually moved from the city to the new industrial suburbs that proliferated after the war. These geographical spaces exist in the films along with the traditional sites of Japan's past, such as the touristed temples and gardens in the old capitals of Kyoto and Kamakura or the *furosato* (hometown) which embodies the maintenance of a village-style consciousness being eroded by urbanism.

The conventional reading of the progression of Ozu's place in the development of the home drama is embodied in Tadao Sato's position that following the liberation of the genre from the wartime policy of the family being subordinate to the state, the home drama under Ozu relinquished its relation to society. From *Late Spring* onwards, he says, 'there was no tension between the outside world

and the home.¹⁴ To me, though, Ozu's films of this period do not seem to embody a unitary and excluding discourse of the family. Instead, they present a series of somewhat contradictory ideas that can be directly explored by examining the specific issue of femininity and spatial representation. In looking at the place of the young female inside and outside the home, I want to argue that Ozu was actually dramatizing questions of belonging and change in ways that could speak to the national female audience about the very things Sato and others have claimed were ignored.

Central to the matter of femininity in the postwar films were two recurrent elements. Firstly, there were the powerful and charismatic performances by Shochiku's rota of character actresses and top-billing stars, perhaps the most famous and celebrated of which was Hara Setsuko, who had come to prominence in the prewar era in roles such as the daughter in the Japanese remake of *Stella Dallas*. She had also been a forces sweetheart during the war and was known for leading roles in postwar films such as Kurosawa Akira's *Waga seishun ni kuinashi/No Regrets for our Youth* (1946). Indeed, so famous was her recurring role as Noriko in *Late Spring*, *Early Summer* and *Tokyo Story* that the name itself became one of the most popular female names of the early postwar generation. Secondly, there was a particular prominence given to feminine space in the home and, with that, aspects of female friendship. In *Late Spring* and *Early Summer*, for example, Noriko's significant confidante and ally, especially when it comes to discussing the inadequacies of men, is Aya (played in both films with great comic vivacity and flippancy by Chikage Awajima). Like Noriko, Aya is represented as a modern and independent woman, aware of the societal pressures on women to conform eventually to the standard pattern of dutiful wedlock and maternity. In *Late Spring*, for instance, the pair are literally separated from the mainstream by their taste for private, non-Japanese-style living spaces above the conventional paternal space below. In a reversal of the standard father-daughter procedure it is Noriko's father who has to bring a tray with bread and tea upstairs to her *Anne of Green Gables*-style room, but because he is neither familiar nor comfortable with this modern feminized environment he forgets two of the key components of the occasion – sugar and spoons.

Hara Setsuko is also associated with markers of western modernity in other sequences of *Late Spring*. The freedom and spontaneity of a seaside bicycle ride is linked with the prominence of a Coca Cola sign, and her character is also revealed in a conversation with the uncle to have had a bobbed haircut, which would have placed her before the war as a stylish *moga* (modern girl).¹⁵ Both Aya and Noriko have working lives outside the home and are pictured with a certain amount of mobility on trains, in street scenes and in coffee shops. Aya, however, is given a more humorous function, partly as a

15 For more on the genealogy of the *moga* see Minam Silverberg 'The modern girl as militant', in Gail Lee Bernstein (ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women 1600–1945* (Berkeley: CA: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 239–67.

consequence of her somewhat driven efforts to be up-to-date and 'westernized' In *Late Spring* her apartment is also decorated in an over-folksy style of Americana and she has zealously spent the afternoon making shortbread, which unfortunately burns Aya's taste for irreverent gossip is part of the reason she is not taken as seriously as Noriko, but the main reason for the centrality of Hara Setsuko's place in the film is that she crucially occupies several, almost contradictory, spaces, whereas Chikage Awajima remains simply the figure of the modern

The figure of Noriko played by Hara Setsuko seems to occupy more than one space in these films because of their narrative emphasis on transition and change. Her sensitivities to the continuities of the past, and especially her reconciliation with older forms of femininity, position her as a pivotal, if ultimately consensual, figure in Ozu's representations of the world of postwar Japan Kathe Geist has developed the idea of Ozu's extensive reliance on symbolic 'allusions to passing time',¹⁶ such as the preponderance of clocks, shots of smokestacks and steam, and so on, by signalling the use of weddings and funerals. Time and again they appear as central components of the way the life cycle is venerated in Japanese ritual culture and exhibit certain similarities. Given this context, the figure of Noriko takes on added significance in these dramas, through marriage in *Late Spring* and *Early Summer* and through the death of her mother-in-law in *Tokyo Story*, she is literally embodied as the important link between one generation and the other. In the funeral sequence in *Tokyo Story*, for instance, the figure of Hara Setsuko is positioned centre-frame. That Noriko has bridged the past and the present is indicated by her father-in-law Shukichi (Ryu Chishu) passing on his dead wife Tomi's watch In an exquisitely moving sequence, Ozu links the continuity of female sympathy and the awareness of the passage of generations by soon afterwards showing Kyoko (Kagawa Kyoko), the youngest daughter and newly placed friend of Noriko, looking out of her school classroom. She glances at *her* watch as she gazes onto the as yet unseen space Ozu then cuts to a shot of Noriko aboard the Tokyo-bound train as she looks down at the watch given to her by Shukichi, the women are linked by the apprehension of the continuity of time

It is perhaps the strength of the impression given by western critics, such as Robin Wood, who view the Japanese *o-miai* (arranged marriage) as 'a tragic fate'¹⁷ that accounts for the lack of attention given thus far to the relationship between the slightly altered Noriko in *Early Summer* and her sister-in-law Fumiko played as the *ryosai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) by Miyake Kuniko The *ryosai kenbo* was part of a historically shifting ideology concerning women's role in Japanese society that had been initiated in the later years of the nineteenth century to strengthen the country against the hegemony of the West As Kathleen S. Uno explains, the

16 Kathe Geist The role of marriage in the films of Yasujiro Ozu', *East-West Film Journal* vol 4 no 1 (1989), p 46

17 Robin Wood The Noriko Trilogy *Cinéaction* no 26/27 (Winter 1992) p 73

Japanese 'good wife' 'carefully managed the affairs of the household and advanced the well-being of its adult members, while the "wise mother" devoted herself to rearing children to become loyal and obedient imperial subjects'.¹⁸ Miyake Kuniko's depiction of the conventions of this figure is far from being an unremarkable component of the film. She is, in fact, another key factor in the way that the film presents a consensual depiction of social change through the prism of the representation of femininity. Miyake Kuniko was herself a well-known actress of the time in Japan, having worked for the Toho and Shochiku studios since the 1930s, and next to the somewhat indecipherable, even foreign, features of Hara Setsuko she represented the less westernized and perhaps ultimately more reassuring face of contemporary Japanese female stardom.¹⁹ The unassuming aspect of Miyake Kuniko's performance serves as a contrast to the way that Noriko here is explicitly linked to the wilful and dynamic star persona of Katherine Hepburn by means of her collection of photos of the star.²⁰ In terms of the film's conceptualization of domestic space, Fumiko is constantly pictured interacting with conventional domestic Japanese design elements. Aya, however, imagines Noriko 'to live western style with sweet music, a flower garden and Coca Cola lined up'.

The *ryosai kenbo* ideology in the immediate prewar period in Japan had been explicitly linked to the identity of the nation in that the figure of the mother was central to the notion of the *national* family. After the war, as Uno has pointed out, despite the new wide-ranging civil and political rights accorded to women, the figure of the mother still remained central in the culture and 'rather than wifehood, [motherhood] became the dominant image of Japanese womanhood'.²¹ It is thus reasonable to assume that the figure of Fumiko represented the norm for the audience of *Early Summer* in 1951, and that Noriko represented a hitherto unassimilated identity. Noriko is certainly represented as the potential voice of radicalism in one of the film's opening scenes in which she, the stiff and humourless Koichi (Ryu Chishu) and Fumiko are discussing 'the increasing impudence of women'. The film structures the group three-shots, and cuts between these and one-shots of the husband and wife, so that the spectator does not see Hara Setsuko's features until a vital reaction shot when she says 'No, we're normal now. Men were over important'. The 180-degree line is also broken in the camerawork to emphasize through matching eyelines the camaraderie that exists between the two women. This camaraderie is a constant throughout the film, with Noriko given both more mobility in the frame and the mobility to come and go from the family home. The ways in which Hara's performance is represented by the mise-en-scene and editing at other significant moments in the film may still work to limit, rather than fully delineate, a complete and transparently progressive female subjectivity, but one cannot ignore

18 Kathleen S. Uno 'The death of "good wife, wise mother"?' in Gordon (ed.) *Postwar Japan as History* p. 297

19 Setsuko Hara's grandfather was German. She also worked with the German director Arnold Fanck on the intriguing German-Japanese co-production *Atarashiki tsuchi/Die Tochter des Samurai* (1937). See Dan Harper, 'Setsuko Hara – the enigma of the eternal virgin', URL <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/02/23/symposium1.html#hara> [01 01 03]

20 Catherine Russell argues differently that Hara is clearly unlike her supposed US counterpart Katherine Hepburn in that rather than being seen as an active agent she in fact has 'such independence thrust upon her'. See Catherine Russell, 'Overcoming modernity', gender and the pathos of history in Japanese film melodrama, *Camera Obscura* no. 35 (May 1995), p. 157.

21 Uno 'The death of "good wife, wise mother"?' p. 303. Uno offers three reasons for this: 'First, mothers became more visible in postwar households, for long term demographic changes and postwar democratic ideologies made it less likely that a young bride, the mother of a household's young children, would share the hearth with another adult woman (generally her husband's mother) as she did before World War II. Second, the diffusion of vacuum cleaners, washers, refrigerators, gas ranges, indoor plumbing, and prepackaged foods eased somewhat a wife's burden of household chores, allowing her more time for childrearing. Third, the rise of employment for wages decreased the proportion of housewives working in family enterprises' (p. 304).

these sensitively articulated seams of feeling and meaning.

The most important exchange between these two women occurs in one of the key scenes towards the end of the film that, significantly, is shot on location outside the house. Noriko has announced that she intends to marry Yabe Kenkichi (Nimoto Ryukan), to the dismay of her family. In the previous shot she has been depicted eating alone, in a darkened deep-focus image and isolated in the frame. The film cuts to an abstracted empty shot of the sand and sea grass before cutting again to a highly unusual crane shot of the figures of Miyake Kuniko and Hara Setsuko moving over a dune. As the camera rises, a further layer of dune is revealed and then, finally, the eye grasps the distant haze of the ocean beyond. The figures are pictured in an evocative landscape shorn of all social trappings, and the conversation that ensues between the two women consequently has an openness and intimacy rare in the more ritualized dimensions of the family household. What is so moving and even astonishing in this sequence is the way that Noriko's previously perceived act of recalcitrance is actually dealt with as a kind of sympathetic model of independence, which can be grasped and even apparently envied by the hitherto more conservative Fumiko. The film cuts to a fuller two-shot from behind the couple, gazing out at the water from the ridge. Noriko sits down and Fumiko follows. It then cuts to a frontal reverse-shot and the anticipated dialogue begins about Fumiko's apprehensiveness over Noriko marrying an older man with a young child. The women both seem to be wearing identical white short-sleeved shirts, but Noriko's proximity to the artificial side-fill lighting gives her an extra luminescence which adds to the tone of ease and confidence that she strikes. They talk about motherhood and housekeeping, but in a way that resolves the fears that Fumiko has for the future. Noriko has decided to reject the other available suitor, a business colleague of her boss. 'Frankly, I don't trust a man who is still single at forty. I trust a man who has a child,' she says, looking out at the horizon. Fumiko turns and looks at Noriko. 'You're wonderful Noriko', she says. 'I knew nothing when I got married.' It is an emotional recognition of the entrapment that the film up until now, in muted reaction shots, has only hinted at. Soon afterwards, Noriko rises and runs down from the ridge out of sight. Fumiko stands and watches, with her hands composedly clasped. Ozu cuts to one of the most liberating images of his career – Setsuko Hara running with joyful open-air freedom across the beach towards the shoreline. She waves to Fumiko as if to encourage her to share her spirit of release. Fumiko decides at last to let go and run after Noriko, tracing her sister-in-law's steps. The film cuts to a final closer tracking shot of the two women walking by the shore – together and reconciled.

So far in this article, I have followed Thomas Elsaesser's dictum that 'nationhood and national identity are not given, but gained'.²² I

have argued that 'Japaneseness' is a mobile concept that must be understood according to historically specific terms and gendered differentials. To caution against any notion of an embedded fixity to the concept of a 'national culture' means instead to be aware of how the concept has been appropriated and, in turn, reformulated according to shifting social circumstances. We have seen that the postwar period in Japan was one of rapid and ongoing change, and it is tempting to say that Ozu's filmic representations suggested a clearly separable set of differences between the old and the new. But this was not the case. Rather, the national was achieved as the result of an active contestation between the past and the present so that a more appealing consensual version of continuity, a sense of the past within the present, was formulated for the national audience. As I shall now argue, this can also be seen in the way Ozu appropriated discourses of the past and national tradition in his representations of place and femininity that lay outside the sphere of the domestic.

Most national narratives, since they are organized along the principle of linear progression, evoke the idea of a journey. The developmental journey from premodern society to the modern is always seen as unfinished, in that there is always more to be achieved in the name of progress. This is necessary so that the contemporary citizen is allowed a part in the organization of the way the future is going to be. It can be argued that in order for this narrative, this biography of nationhood, to make sense, a parallel journey must be conceived of to take account of the past. In the face of the contradictions of Japan's postwar modernity that existed partly because of the unresolved definition of the legacy of the war, and partly because of Japan's unfinished engagement with the West, Ozu's female-centred dramas specifically enacted this process of two-way looking. Part of the reason that the director has been celebrated as the standard-bearer of Japaneseness is that he appears to have undertaken this process of remembering, recording and inscribing what it means to be a citizen of Japan. His films worked as a form of census, in that over time they captured the full range and vitality of the ordinary female and male members of the national community. The variety of social types and the attention given to modes and norms of everydayness constituted a kind of record. His films can even be seen as social and visual maps, in that they describe with infinite precision the contours and details of places which, once again, seem chosen for their typicality. This much has been glimpsed in his representations of domestic space, but it can also be argued that the same is true for his other destinations. Thus, for example, the railway, that all-pervading element of Ozu's cinema, can now be seen in its fullest context. The train not only made visual the mapping of the nation to the audience by literally picturing transition from one place to another – be it from Onomichi to Tokyo in *Tokyo Story*, or Tokyo to Okayama in *Soshun/Early Spring* (1956) – it also

suggested the two-way nature of modernity through the duality of departure and arrival. To get somewhere, you have to leave something behind.

The journey is used as a significant element in the narrative of *Late Spring*. Although there are a number of representations of travel between Kamakura and the modern capital in the film, the most significant journey, from Tokyo to the ancient capital of Kyoto, occurs towards the end of the narrative. It is a moment resonant with endings and beginnings, for this is the last occasion on which Noriko will spend time alone with her father before embarking on the further journey of marriage with her husband-to-be. Although we do not see the train itself, the process of journeying is vividly evoked in the everyday intimacy of the conversation between Noriko and Somya (Ryu Chishu) in the *ryokan* (inn). As their recounting of the key locations en route suggests, the journey between Tokyo and Kyoto is already mapped in the consciousness of the Japanese citizen. In feudal times the lords and their vassals had to make an annual pilgrimage to pay respect to the *shogun* in Tokyo (or Edo as it was then called). This route was called the *Tokkaido*. For most modern Japanese this route is now traced in reverse to facilitate another pilgrimage of sorts – that of the rediscovery of traditional values and heritage connected to Japaneseness. Kyoto is represented in the film both as a kind of museum, a place of shared belonging to a common past, and as a tourist destination. In a key scene set on the ancient verandahs of the Kiyomizu temple, *Late Spring* suggests an interrelationship between a citizen's apprehension of a communal history and a citizen's private, individual narrative. The sequence begins with a deep-focus shot looking out from an angle of forty-five degrees from the first verandah to a second, which is more or less parallel to the picture plane in the middle distance of the image. Between the two verandahs is an expanse of space from which the odd tree or bush protrudes. The appearance of a group of sailor-suited schoolgirls, evidently on an organized excursion, suggests the status of the temple as a national monument and evokes the intermingling of the contemporary with the timelessness of tradition. This dualism is replicated on the soundtrack with the merging of the chanting of monks and the laughter of the pupils. As the girls leave the image, Somya and Misako, Noriko's uncle's new wife, enter and move to the foregrounded verandah. Ozu cuts to medium closeup two-shot. Somya remarks that Kyoto is so relaxing compared to Tokyo where there is 'only dust'.²³ This obvious reference to the results of the firebombing of the capital reminds one that Kyoto was spared the onslaught of the Allies and thus, in the postwar period, was significantly able to strengthen its image as the repository of Japanese heritage. Kyoto is a place to get away from the processes of modern national reconstruction and retrieve a sense of national continuity. This feeling is translated into personal terms when

23 According to Kyoko Hirano because of the extreme sensitivity shown by the Occupation authorities towards mention or depiction of the Allied devastation the word dust was preferred to 'burned sites'. See Kyoko Hirano, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) p. 56.

Somiya remarks nostalgically that this is the first time that he has visited the city since the war. There is a cry of 'Uncle' from the opposite verandah and a wave from one of three distant figures. Ozu cuts back to the establishing long-shot and Somiya returns the wave. The next shot reverses the field of vision across the empty space between the verandahs with the three previously indistinguishable figures shot now from behind and pictured in medium closeup gazing across to Somiya and Mitsuko. They are revealed to be Noriko, her uncle and her niece. With this shift in spatial location, Ozu shifts also to a more private register as Hara Setsuko and her uncle banter about his decision to remarry. That she finds this 'distasteful' is of significance, as Noriko's father, in order to persuade his daughter to find a husband, pretended to have found a prospective second wife. Ozu cuts back to a virtually repeated long-shot of the three figures, but this time deprived of any foreground element. The camera observes them engaging in a highly staged sequence of gestural play, as if the temple grounds have assumed the dimensions of a theatrical arena. We return to Somiya and Mitsuko who walk off screen as a new group of schoolgirls enters from screen right. Ozu then cuts to the final and most serene shot of the sequence in which both the passing of national and private time are evoked simultaneously. We see the image divided into three zones. On the left and the right are the solid architectural features of the wooden temple; in the centre is a gap. A traditional bamboo chute, associated with the purification of the soul in Buddhist ritual, is seen dripping water on the left. The water is an allusion to Noriko's ongoing comments to her uncle that she finds his decision to change his life 'unclean', but it also evokes a sense of national ritual across time, for that water could have dripped for centuries. As if to underline this mention of renewal and continuity across the generations, more schoolgirls pass across the gap between the two zones to the accompaniment of a reprise of the film's theme music. Because they are young girls, quite unusual for Ozu who tended to use boys in his casts, they also suggest a link to Noriko and, because they are also in the national school uniform, they evoke the nation's future, the Japanese world to come.

In this essay I have challenged the dominant point of view that Ozu's postwar cinema was an inward looking and fully conservative body of work. I have begun to move beyond the standard analysis of his distinctive style of filmmaking as a means of radical alterity to the western canon and started to consider the complex ways in which his films can be seen as representations that deal with the intertwined matters of Japanese modernity and a national gendered identity. Ozu's films of this period were home dramas, coinciding with a prevailing discourse which positioned women as facilitators of 'a transition from a patrilineal household system to a woman-

24 Lisa Skov and Brian Moeran, 'Introduction: hiding in the light from Oshin to Yoshimoto Banana', in Skov and Moeran (eds) *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995), pp. 23–4

centred nuclear family in which . . . men's dominance in the public sphere was neatly complemented by women's power at home'.²⁴ But this evidently did not mean a wholesale regressive tendency. Through the careful articulation of performance and spatial organization, the films suggested a set of negotiated tensions about the places women could occupy in a nation in which the values of tradition and modernity were in flux. The values and conflicts of contemporary urban life in the postwar period were dramatized by suggesting a prevailing sense of typicality and ordinariness. Ozu was minutely interested in the detail of national life and his visual style bears significant resemblance to the work of contemporaneous photographic social documentarists such as Kuwabara Kineo, Kimura Ihee and Hayashi Tadahiko. This attentiveness to the materiality of Japaneseness was also, it should be said, a result of the contributions of Tatsuo Hamada, his regular art director. But it was particularly because of the sophisticated range of the Shochiku female stars that prominence was so clearly given to the way feminine space became *the* field in which the contemporary and the traditional were fought over. Today these films appear to be historical artefacts – exquisitely composed images of a world already largely gone. But in their day, when cinema was still the way in which a nation saw moving images of itself, these films spoke to what was probably a largely female mass entertainment audience, ready to see a visualization of the necessarily two-way perspective it had on its own relationship to the national past and present.

I would like to acknowledge the kind assistance of V.F. Perkins and Mori Toshie during the course of the preparation for this essay

Between friends: love and friendship in contemporary Hollywood romantic comedy

CELESTINO DELEYTO

Romantic comedy has traditionally been considered one of the most ahistorical, or transhistorical, of genres. From Northrop Frye's mythical account of generic conventions to Steve Neale's and Frank Krutnik's view that the genre has always sought to hold cultural transformations in place, theorists and critics have emphasized its extremely rigid and codified nature.¹ At a time when the intimate culture of the USA and other western societies has undergone such profound changes, the renewed success of romantic comedy in the 1980s and 1990s seems to bear witness to this allegiance to a generic tradition which is adamantly evoked as a defence against social convulsions in the very institutions of love, sexuality and marriage with which it deals. Its resilience may be due, according to Kathleen Rowe, to the powerful need in human beings to believe in the utopian possibilities condensed in the image of the couple,² or, in other words, to the irresistible attraction of the notion of love, a concept that is so important in our lives and in the surrounding culture that we have forgotten that it is a cultural creation, an 'invention' of a group of Provençal poets at the end of the eleventh century. It almost goes without saying that romantic comedy owes its existence to the cultural prestige of love, to the importance of the couple and marriage as basic institutions of our society. The genre in its modern form appears in the Renaissance, when love, which in the tradition of courtly love had been strictly an extra-marital affair, is converted into the road to, and the principal reason for, marriage. At

1 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957) and *A Natural Perspective: the Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1965); Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 171.

2 Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995), p. 212.

- 3 Mary Beth Rose *The Expense of Spirit Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca NY and London Cornell University Press 1988)

that moment, love and marriage are fused together in a single narrative, a modern concept of society based on the nuclear family is inaugurated and romantic comedy is born.³ Nowadays, a romantic comedy is still primarily conceived as a narrative in which a man and a woman (or several men and women) fall in love, discover that they have found their 'special person' and end up, if not always at the altar, at least promising each other eternal love. If we look at the success of Kenneth Branagh's adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) and compare it with that of films like *Sleepless in Seattle* (Nora Ephron, 1993) or *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999), we may conclude that things have not changed very much in the last four hundred years.

However, a closer look at the history of the genre in the cinema, and its consideration within the context of larger historical and cultural shifts in people's understanding and experience of love, may tell us a different story. My contention in this essay is not only, in general terms, that romantic comedy has been in a process of constant transformation throughout its history but, more specifically, that a rather unexpected new tendency has arisen within the genre over the last fifteen years or so: in a growing number of contemporary romantic comedies, heterosexual love appears to be challenged, and occasionally replaced, by friendship. This may be seen as a logical consequence of the genre's relentless interrogation of the concept of love in view of its perceived crisis in the surrounding culture but, in terms of its recent history, it also appears to be a reasonable follow-up to earlier trends identified by the critics. I shall first sketch this internal development of the Hollywood genre over the last twenty-five years and offer *My Best Friend's Wedding* (P.J. Hogan, 1997) as an exemplary case which both encapsulates and makes visible the contours of this recent history.

It is not my intention here to discuss the history of the concept of love, but suffice it to say at this stage that the abundant recent bibliography on the subject clearly suggests that love as we understand it, or as we perceive it in romantic comedy, is not a universal phenomenon, nor has it remained immutable throughout its long history in western culture.⁴ Something similar may be said about romantic comedy itself. Rather than professing an absolute allegiance to its traditional codes and conventions, the genre has managed to transform and adapt itself to social change, and it is precisely this malleability that has ensured its continuing popularity. While, on the surface, the genre insists on the eternal nature of romantic love and on its irresistible capacity to overcome any obstacles, it has remained alert to its cultural context, which invariably has found itself somehow incorporated into its narrative plots. Since Brian Henderson's famously misguided prediction that at the end of the 1970s, as a result of important changes in western sexual culture, gender relationships and identity, romantic comedy

- 4 See for example, Michel Foucault's prestigious *The History of Sexuality Volume I: an Introduction* (1976), trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth Penguin 1981) and Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love & Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge Polity Press 1992) or referring more specifically to the USA social histories of love and sexuality such as John d'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman *Intimate Matters: a History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago IL and London University of Chicago Press, 1997) Steve Seidman *Romantic Longings: Love in America 1830-1980* (New York, NY and London Routledge, 1991), and *Embattled Eros: Sexual Politics and Ethics in Contemporary America* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

- 5 Brian Henderson, 'Romantic comedy today: semi-tough or impossible?', *Film Quarterly* vol. 31 no. 4 (1978) p. 19.

5 Brian Henderson 'Romantic comedy today: semi-tough or impossible?' *Film Quarterly* vol 31 no 4 (1978), p 19

6 Frank Krutnik 'The faint aroma of performing seals the "nervous" romance and the comedy of the sexes' *The Velvet Light Trap* no 26 (Fall 1990), pp 57–72

7 Steve Neale 'The Big romance or Something Wild?' *romantic comedy today*, *Screen* vol 33, no 3 (1992) pp 286–7

8 Frank Krutnik 'Love lies romantic fabrication in contemporary romantic comedy', in Peter W Evans and Celestino Deleyto (eds) *Terms of Endearment: Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1980s and 1990s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp 31–3

was about to die,⁵ three important tendencies in the evolution of the genre have been identified by genre theorists Neale and Krutnik. First came what Krutnik labelled 'nervous romances' – films such as *Annie Hall* (Woody Allen, 1977), *The Goodbye Girl* (Neil Simon, 1977), *Starting Over* (Alan J. Pakula, 1979) or *Manhattan* (Woody Allen, 1979) – which, in an age of divorce and growing crisis within the institution of marriage, were structured around the tension between the characters' reluctance to commit and a wish-fulfilment pull towards an earlier, more secure era.⁶ The ideological specificity of these films consisted in what Neale later described as the dislocation of fucking from commitment and the dislocation of both these things from marriage. In the same article, however, Neale finds that when, in the mid 1980s, the genre reasserted itself with films like *Splash*¹ (Ron Howard, 1984), *Romancing the Stone* (Robert Zemeckis, 1984), *Murphy's Romance* (Martin Ritt, 1985), *Something Wild* (Jonathan Demme, 1986), *Peggy Sue Got Married* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1986), *Big* (Penny Marshall, 1988) and others, the 'nervous romance' was replaced by the 'new romance', a type of romantic comedy which was characterized by a persistent evocation and endorsement of the signs and values of 'old-fashioned' romance, and a more unambiguous tendency to return to traditional or ideologically conventional positions, especially in the case of female characters, a tendency which Neale sees as a way of countering the threat of female independence.⁷ More recently, Krutnik has noticed a different emphasis in romantic comedies from the 1990s such as *Green Card* (Peter Weir, 1990), *Housesitter* (Frank Oz, 1992), *While You Were Sleeping* (John Turteltaub, 1995) and *The Truth about Cats and Dogs* (Michael Lehmann I, 1996). These are what he calls 'deception narratives': films that overtly frame romance as the construction of a representation. Learning to love in an age in which everything that could be said about love has already been, involves learning to lie and to 'love the lie'.⁸ For Krutnik, although romantic comedies of the 1990s betray an awareness of the artificiality of romantic conventions, the texts still want to believe in them, using this artificiality as a new basis for the articulation of love in their narratives. In all of these tendencies, love is perceived, directly or indirectly, to be in crisis, its centrality in the stories is shaken in various ways, but there appears to be no substitute within the genre. At the same time, however, a substantial number of films in the last decade or so, while showing the same type of hesitation about the viability of romantic love in our society, have begun to perceive friendship as an increasingly acceptable alternative to love within the genre.

My Best Friend's Wedding, one of the most popular romantic comedies of the 1990s, is the most outstanding example of this tendency, simultaneously incorporating, palimpsest-like, residual features of the nervous and new romances and illustrating Krutnik's

theory of 'romantic deception'. A film like *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990) had already suggested, seven years earlier that, rather than believing in the love story between its two protagonists, the spectator should let herself be carried away by the brilliance of its representations, by the allure of the ironic repetition of a set of social rituals that, in the real world, have lost part of their validity. The film did not so much suggest that what was narrated might be true, but invited us to recognize, in an age of lost innocence, the cultural and filmic mechanisms that made it possible, not in reality but in the cinema. *My Best Friend's Wedding* insists on the same postmodern strategy, especially through the use of songs. Notable examples are the final version of 'The Way You Look Tonight', performed by the maids of honour, and the moment when George (Rupert Everett) culminates his totally invented account of the first time he saw Julianne with a rendition of the Aretha Franklin song 'I Say a Little Prayer'. In both cases, it is not so much the meaning of the lyrics that the spectator is expected to respond to as the irresistible appeal of their musical forms. Neale has explained that in the new romances the constant use of old love songs indicates the texts' intentions of returning to traditional forms of romance, in accordance with the conservative tendencies of the historical moment in which they appeared.⁹ In my view, the presence of these songs in *My Best Friend's Wedding* and other contemporary romantic comedies suggests nostalgia for a period in which the emotions and feelings alluded to in the lyrics were still credible. At the same time, these songs acknowledge that, even if we do no longer believe in the values they represent, they can still provide entertainment and emotion.

The ending of the film reinforces this idea and confirms the presence of a postmodern aesthetic of ironic vampirization of traditional rituals. Here, Julianne, the film's extremely 'nervous' protagonist, played by Julia Roberts, is shown dancing with her gay friend, George. She is therefore portrayed as resigned to a loneliness that she has thoroughly deserved throughout the film. She must, in consequence, 'make do' with an apparently wholly inadequate substitute for romantic love. There are several aspects to be mentioned with respect to this ending. First, as in many other romantic comedies this narrative ends in a wedding but, unusually, not in the protagonist's wedding but one that sanctions the union she has been trying to prevent throughout the film. Secondly, although the traditional happy ending never actually takes place – Michael and Kimberley's wedding, although based on 'true love', cannot fulfil the spectator's expectations from the point of view of the conventions of the genre because this wedding renders the consummation of Julianne's desire impossible – the stylistic strategies activated in this final scene do not express a sense of the protagonist's loneliness and frustration. On the contrary, the atmosphere of celebration and

⁹ Neale, 'The Big romance', p. 296

optimism constructed by the mise-en-scene and by the music convey the idea that this is, after all, a happy ending. Thirdly, the final dance between Julianne and George seeks the audience's complicity not with the erotic meaning of the ritual but with its form. Finally, and crucially for my argument in this essay, it is not quite true that Julianne remains alone at the end of the film. The substitute of her lover is her best friend, a friendship which implies, as he himself reminds her, the exclusion of sexual desire and heterosexual union; a relationship which now appears as the most important one in the film. However appealing the love rituals constructed by the film may be for the postmodern spectator, there is a preferable option for the protagonist, and that is George's friendship. The alternative that emerges in the happy ending, without abandoning the world of romantic comedy, is for Julianne every bit as fulfilling as the love she has craved throughout the narrative.

From a generic point of view, the film's logic immediately begs the question. how can a romantic comedy suggest that friendship is more important than love, that the ideal mate is the friend and not the lover? Is it not a flagrant contradiction for a film that apparently adheres to the conventions of the genre (and an obviously mainstream film at that) to put love on a secondary plane, in a position of subordination to friendship? Following a logic similar to Henderson's argument, are we witnessing the second death of romantic comedy in the cinema? Is romantic love so devalued nowadays that one of the artistic discourses that has contributed most to its enthronelement may be turning against it? For as I shall demonstrate, *My Best Friend's Wedding* is not an isolated case but, rather, it is the most visible and popular example of a broader tendency in romantic comedy to examine the importance of friendship in contemporary society and to explore the tensions that it creates in its rapport with heterosexual desire. It is not as if all of these texts unambiguously posit the superiority of friendship over romantic love in our society. Instead, the dramatization of various types of confrontation between the two attachments produce diverse outcomes that depend both on the readiness of individual texts to bend or expand the conventions of the genre and also, crucially, on the gender of the friends. For this reason, my analysis of the films will group them according to the gender of the friends in question. male, female and heterofriends. Since detailed textual analysis of a large number of films cannot be encompassed within the format of a short essay, I shall focus on the most significant features of their overall narrative developments and concentrate particularly on the endings, not because I agree with those who posit the convention of the 'happy ending' as the genre's only important narrative and ideological convention, but precisely because of the ideological significance of the instabilities that they often attempt to hide¹⁰

¹⁰ For a more detailed account of romantic comedy endings see Celestino Deleyto, 'They lived happily ever after: ending contemporary romantic comedy' *Miscelánea*, no. 19 (1998), pp. 39–55.

- 11 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York NY: Columbia University Press 1985)

- 12 Cynthia J. Fuchs 'The buddy politic', in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds) *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (New York NY and London: Routledge 1993) p. 194. Chris Holmlund, 'Masculinity as multiple masquerade: the "mature Stallone clone"', in Cohan and Hark (eds), *Screening the Male* p. 220.

- 13 For more detailed interpretations of the Martin/Lewis film partnership, see Ed Sikov, *Laughing Hysterically: American Screen Comedy of the 1950s* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press 1994) pp. 185–95; Frank Krutnik, *Inventing Jerry Lewis* (Washington DC and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 2000), pp. 39–67.

- 14 See, among others, Cohan and Hark (eds) *Screening the Male*; Tania Modleski, *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a Postfeminist Age* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991); Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (New York, NY and London: Routledge 1993); Susan Jettards, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 1994).

In her theory of the hegemony of male homosocial desire in English and US literature, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick affirms that it is social relations of all kinds between men rather than heterosexual relations that guarantee the survival of patriarchal structures.¹¹ Sedgwick's contention has taught us to realize the importance of male-to-male relationships in a great number of literary and cinematic texts, and it reminds us that not all intense relationships between men in novels and films need to be interpreted through the existence of homoerotic subtexts; such generalizations tend to obscure the cultural power of friendships and rivalries between men. Following her lead, film critics such as Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs have theorized a genre that has competed in popularity with romantic comedy in the 1980s and 1990s: the 'buddy film'. Framing her discussion within the action/adventure genre, Fuchs argues that the buddy film presents the 'exciting, troubling relation between two male bodies', while for Holmlund, the films narrate stories of male friendship and bonding through the constant revelation of beautiful male bodies. These are men who are there to be contemplated, both by women and by other men.¹² Women in these films are often present only in order to guarantee the men's heterosexuality, but are otherwise unnecessary to the narratives. What matters, what 'makes the world go round', is the male bond.

In romantic comedy any relationship of this type has traditionally been subordinated to heterosexual love. For this reason, this is the genre to which Sedgwick's theory is most difficult to apply. Apart from isolated examples like Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* (1959) or *Kiss Me Stupid* (1964), Hollywood romantic comedy has only been able to incorporate male buddies into its structure when moving into the realm of 'comedian' comedy, specifically in the case of 'comic couple' films, such as Bob Hope and Bing Crosby or Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin. These films are not strictly speaking romantic comedies, but they often feature a love story (Dorothy Lamour was the female 'interest' in the case of Hope and Crosby's *Road to* series) in order to provide more opportunities for comic exploitation of the tension between the two men. One common characteristic of these films is that male homosocial and heterosexual relationships are presented as perfectly compatible, with the latter subordinated to the former, in a hierarchy that inevitably relegates women to secondary roles.¹³

Sedgwick's work can be related to a much wider cultural phenomenon: the re-evaluation of masculinity in a society which has been partly transformed by feminist movements (and, secondarily, by gay movements). It could be said that since the mid 1980s masculinity has become fashionable, and numerous films of that decade immediately contributed to the reinforcement of this fashion.¹⁴ It was therefore only a question of time before this cultural exploration of masculinity and male relations started to make its

appearance in romantic comedy. Now, however, unlike the films of the comic couples mentioned before, the emphasis is no longer on the compatibility between male homosocial and heterosexual desire but on the tensions between the two. Films such as *We're No Angels* (Neil Jordan, 1989) and *White Men Can't Jump* (Ron Shelton, 1992), as well as *Much Ado About Nothing*, suggest that male homosocial relationships are the greatest enemy of the ideology of romantic comedy and its idealization of the heterosexual couple. A brilliant illustration of this dialectic occurs in the final scene of *We're No Angels*. After an endless succession of delays, Ned (Robert de Niro) and Jim (Sean Penn), two escaped prisoners disguised as Catholic priests, are about to cross the border over to Canada and to freedom, but one final unexpected obstacle appears: Jim decides that he would prefer to stay in their hiding place, a monastery where a friendly young monk awaits him with open arms. The mise-en-scene intensifies the moment in which Jim, standing in the middle of the bridge, hesitates between following his friend or choosing what the film unambiguously presents as a budding homosexual relationship. Jim finally settles for the romantic comedy option (homosexual variety) while Ned conveniently replaces him with Molly (Demi Moore), with whom he has fallen in love, deciding to start a new family life with her and her daughter across the border. This romantic comedy ending is particularly significant because of the clear-sightedness with which it suggests that romantic love is incompatible with the male homosocial bond: when he sees Ned and Molly walking together towards the border, Jim realizes that their friendship cannot continue and decides to remain in a place where love will replace friendship for him too.

A similar incompatibility is articulated in *White Men Can't Jump*, another hybrid of romantic comedy and the buddy film, but with a different ending. The film features the triangle formed by Billy Hoyle (Woody Harrelson), a young man obsessed with basketball, his girlfriend Gloria (Rosie Pérez), who wants a stable relationship, and his friend and basketball mate Sidney (Wesley Snipes). At the end of the film, Gloria, tired of waiting for Billy to change, decides to leave him. Thus, the couple that remains intact is that formed by the two men. There is no visible homosexual desire between these two characters; it is their homosocial bond that finally triumphs over the heterosexual relationship. In terms of generic conventions, it is as if romantic comedy and buddy film had engaged in a battle in which the buddy film has come out triumphant. As in *My Best Friend's Wedding*, the stylistic conventions of the happy ending are still activated, even though the heterosexual couple has been broken and it is the two male friends who, in the final shot, walk off together into the Californian sunset. It must be said, however, that in this film heterosexual desire is still seen as a superior option to male friendship, and it is only Billy's childishness that prevents him from

realizing it in time. In spite of the ending, then, the film is closer to the conventions of romantic comedy than to those of the buddy film, but what is important is, as in the previous example, its awareness of the incompatibility between the two genres and the two types of relationship.

The significance of this insight can be confirmed if we compare *White Men* to a later comedy, *Play it to the Bone* (1999), also directed by Ron Shelton, also about the world of sports (in this case, boxing) and also starring Woody Harrelson. In this film, a similar triangle is formed between two male friends (Harrelson and Antonio Banderas) and a woman (Lolita Davidovich), but the difference, and what makes this film less satisfying, is that in the final scene the three of them are still together, in an ending that leaves all the contradictions of the film unresolved. Because it does not fully acknowledge the tensions at which it has hinted, *Play it to the Bone* feels like a more trivial, less culturally committed text than its predecessor. As I have argued elsewhere, the success of the film version of *Much Ado about Nothing* may also be related to a similar awareness of the impossibility of the growth of romantic love in a world dominated by men.¹⁵ In both the original play and the film, romantic comedy is literally born out of the ashes of the powerful male group. Messina is a female space in which the company of men cannot survive. In a climactic moment of the story, Beatrice asks Benedick to choose between her and his friends. It is a proof of the male protagonist's maturity that he chooses her and learns to reject the male homosocial bond.

On the evidence of these examples, it could be said that the increasingly frequent presence of male homosocial desire in the midst of romantic comedy, rather than threatening the predominance of heterosexual desire in the genre, calls the spectator's attention to the need to choose between the two, a need that had been traditionally hidden by patriarchal discourses. In a historical climate of deep interrogation of traditional masculinity's attributes, these examples of romantic comedy bring together two different cultural crises: the crisis of romantic love and the crisis of masculinity.¹⁶ The outcome is a scenario in which, in spite of growing difficulties, love is seen as preferable to homosocial desire for contemporary men. It therefore seems that whenever male friendships appear in films they attempt to pull the narrative away from the conventions of romantic comedy, but do not hold sufficient cultural prestige to produce a revolution in the genre.

A more serious threat is posed by the presence of female friendships. For Karen Hollinger, these films first appear as a genre in the 1970s. During this decade, a transformation took place in the history of the woman's film which gave birth to two new varieties: the independent woman's film and the female friendship film. In the 1980s, while the independent woman's film went into decline or was

15 Celestino Deleyto, 'Men in leather: Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* and romantic comedy', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 36 no. 3 (1997) p. 101.

16 See, for example Victor J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language and Sexuality* (New York: NY and London: Routledge, 1989); John MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity* (Philadelphia: PA and Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998); Susan Faludi, *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Vintage 1992), and *Stuffed: the Betrayal of Modern Man* (London: Vintage 2000).

converted into the traditional maternal melodrama, the female friendship film came to dominate the woman's film market. While, as we have seen, the buddy film has developed mainly within the adventure genre, the female friendship film has been closer to genres traditionally coded as 'feminine', such as comedy and melodrama. If patriarchal society had traditionally concealed the incompatibilities between male homosocial desire and heterosexual love, in the case of female friends, cinematic male lovers have always been strongly opposed to the women's relationship, which they see as a threat to the exclusivity of heterosexuality. For this reason, when female friendships did appear at all in romantic comedies, they were codified – as in their literary forerunners that go back at least as far as Jane Austen – as conventionally previous to the arrival of 'true love'.¹⁷ However, more recent comedies such as *Mystic Pizza* (Donald Petrie, 1988) or *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995) (a modern version of Austen's *Emma*) show a different emphasis: the conventional wedding with which they both end, and which seems to signal the end of female friendship and the beginning of maturity, never actually makes us forget that the true narrative interest of the films lies in the relations between the women. If romantic comedy presents, according to Rowe, a utopian space, it is not romantic love but female friendship that occupies this space. *Clueless* is particularly interesting in this respect: at the beginning of the final scene, the film momentarily tricks us into believing that the wedding ceremony that is taking place is that of its central couple, but the main character, Cher Horowitz (Alicia Silverstone), immediately frustrates our expectations by explaining, through her voiceover narration, that she is 'way' too young and has no intention of marrying for the moment. Although the setting is that of the conventional wedding, the happy ending here strengthens the friendship bond between the teenagers to the detriment of the heterosexual couple. The film is a hybrid of romantic comedy and teen comedy and, in this case, the worldview of the latter, with its emphasis on the peer group and the celebration of adolescence, predominates.

The trend continues in *The Truth about Cats and Dogs* and *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion* (David Mirkin, 1997). In *The Truth*, two neighbours, Abby (Janeane Garofalo) and Noelle (Uma Thurman) meet and become friends, but their friendship is soon threatened when they start to compete for the love of the same man. The plot revolves around Abby's insecurity about her body, which is why, when she becomes interested in the male protagonist, she asks Noelle to take her place. Like *Beautiful Girls* (Ted Demme, 1996), this film criticizes men's superficiality and lack of maturity when, having physical beauty as their only criterion, they are incapable of seeing beyond their own prejudices ('The truth is Helen of Troy', says Abby). A consequent series of mistakes of identity, provoked in Krutnik's terms by the female characters' 'self-fabrication',

17 Karen Hollinger *In the Company of Women: Contemporary Female Friendship Films* (Minneapolis MN and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1998) pp. 2–3, 47, 55–6

constitutes the main body of the narrative. When the jealousy between the two women reaches an unbearable point, Noelle decides to give up the man she desires for the sake of her friend and their relationship. In a conversation with Abby, she admits that, if she has to choose, she prefers their friendship to a heterosexual relationship. Again, the conventional happy ending, in which Abby and Brian (Ben Chaplin) end up together, does not allow us to forget that the real couple that has been formed in the course of the film is that of two women.

The romantic happy ending does not even take place in *Romy and Michele*, a film in which, after a series of unhappy love affairs at High School and attempts at pretending they have 'made it', the two protagonists (played by Mira Sorvino and Lisa Kudrow), end up together, the proud owners of a fashionable clothes shop, financed by the only man that has been worthy of their interest: a millionaire who had been in love with one of them but who has now become a mere cheque book that serves to keep them together. A similar structure can also be found in *Muriel's Wedding* (1994), the Australian film directed by P.J. Hogan that anticipated his success with *My Best Friend's Wedding*. Apparently as obsessed with the ritual of weddings as the film's director himself, the main character, Muriel (Toni Collette) desperately seeks a man to marry but ends up finding a true friend with whom she starts a new life far away from their childhood town, a space identified with alienating and repressive heterosexual love.

While both combining female friendship and heterosexual love, these films approach the tensions between the two from different perspectives. The relationship between Noelle and Abby in *The Truth* stems from their heterosexual desire and their mutual interest in seducing Brian, but in *Romy and Michele* heterosexual desire always takes a secondary position to the female bond, and in *Muriel's Wedding* heterosexual desire, or rather the desire to re-enact its fascinating rituals, is finally replaced by friendship with another woman. These different developments place the films in different positions *vis-à-vis* the conventions of romantic comedy, but, while the world-views of this genre and the buddy film appear to be ultimately incompatible in the examples discussed above, in the case of female friendships the effect is rather one of expanding the thematic structures of romantic comedy. No matter how ready to shift its limits, the genre cannot encompass male friendships but finds it easier to incorporate female friends, even when they threaten the primacy of heterosexual love.

This malleability of the genre is even more apparent in independent films. When *Walking and Talking* (1996) came out, its director Nicole Holofcener was hailed by some critics as the female Woody Allen.¹⁸ This comparison is significant because it places the film within the generic boundaries of romantic comedy to which

¹⁸ Liese Spencer 'Walking and talking', *Sight and Sound* vol. 7 no. 1 (1997) p. 54; Caroline Westbrook 'Walking and talking', *Empire* no. 92 (February 1997) p. 38; Scott Macaulay 'Wedding bells blues', *Filmmaker* vol. 4 no. 4 (1996) pp. 44–5.

19 See Bruce Babington and Peter W. Evans *Affairs to Remember: the Hollywood Comedy of the Sexes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 152–78; Frank Krutnik 'Love lies pp. 20–24; Celestino Deleyto 'Love and other triangles: *Alice* and the conventions of romantic comedy' in Evans and Deleyto (eds), *Terms of Endearment* pp. 129–47.

many of Allen's films belong, however problematically. Yet there are also important differences: Allen's explorations of the genre from the 1970s to the 1990s have revolved around the evolution of heterosexual love in contemporary US society and its relation to sex and to changing concepts of masculinity and femininity, and have generally relegated friendships of any description to the background.¹⁹ Holofcener's film, on the other hand, not only shows heterosexual romance from an openly female perspective but also reverses the conventions of the genre and presents various heterosexual relationships as the obstacle to the survival of the friendship between its two female protagonists. Near the beginning of the film, for example, when Frank (Todd Field) asks Laura (Anne Heche) to marry him, her most important concern is not so much whether she should accept but the impact that the news will have on her friend Amelia (Catherine Keener). In the course of the narrative both this and other heterosexual relationships, as well as the female friendship, undergo crises, but the film's main emphasis is on the way in which the two friends will overcome their crisis. The final shot is, in spite of stylistic differences, equivalent to that of *My Best Friend's Wedding*: Laura and Frank's wedding, the conventional ending of romantic comedy, is summarized in a shot of the two female friends, Laura in her wedding dress, going down the stairs of Amelia's country house, where the wedding is about to take place, before the shot fades to black and the final credits appear. This framing is highly evocative because it visually privileges the female bond over romantic love and thematically suggests an uncertainty about a future which does not primarily concern marriage but friendship. Although, as an independent film, *Walking and Talking* is theoretically freer from strict allegiance to generic conventions than mainstream movies, its narrative never moves outside the limits of the genre, and yet the impression it conveys is, in a more thorough way than *My Best Friend's Wedding*, that romantic love need not be the only concern, nor the most important one, of romantic comedy. In view of the evidence provided by the films analyzed in this section, heterosexual love and desire still have a place in film comedies that foreground female friendships but they tend to play, more or less directly, second fiddle to it, calling our attention to the impact of feminism on the conventions of the genre.

In the films discussed so far, the primacy of heterosexual desire in romantic comedy has been challenged both from outside (the male bond) and inside (female friendships) the genre, but its overall validity has not been fundamentally questioned. In fact, in the male friendship hybrids of romantic comedy and the buddy film, the result has been not its decay or disappearance but rather a strengthening of its position, by highlighting its traditional egalitarian ideology against

the patriarchal preference for male homosocial desire. Female friendship, on the other hand, appears to be forcing the genre to shift its boundaries. But if there is one type of relationship that is opposed to the traditional ideology of romantic comedy, it is that of friendship between characters of different sexes. For Scott Swain, this type of friendship is such a recent social phenomenon in western culture that it has yet to be properly codified. It is a social anomaly that has always been obscured by, on the one hand, same-sex friendships and, on the other, heterosexual love. For this reason, a relationship between men and women that excludes heterosexual desire is a subversive activity that threatens the structure of patriarchy.²⁰ Swain argues that, as with female friendships, this type of relationship has commonly been seen as a logical prelude to the establishment of a more intimate, sexual attachment. This is the form it takes in the film that inaugurated the exploration of male–female friendship in contemporary romantic comedy, *When Harry Met Sally* (Rob Reiner, 1989). Harry (Billy Crystal) believes that friendship between a man and a woman is impossible because it will, sooner or later, become sexual desire. It is significant that in this film it is the man who defends this position and the woman who disagrees. Although Harry's view is presented through a discourse of sexual liberation, Swain's theory reminds us that the man defends the more traditional position and the woman the most transgressive one. In any case, Harry and Sally become friends and, eventually, lovers. The film, therefore, ultimately defends the primacy and inevitability of heterosexual desire, but, apart from being emblematic of the evolution of the genre,²¹ it envisages the *possibility* of heterosocial friendship in romantic comedy. A few years later, *The Mirror Has Two Faces* (Barbra Streisand, 1996) proposes a similar scenario, although in this film it is the man (Jeff Bridges) who believes in the possibility of genuine friendship and affection without the presence of love or sex between man and woman, and the woman (Barbra Streisand) who eventually persuades him that love must finally take over. This film, in fact, unlike most of those discussed so far, seems to firmly uphold the illusion that nothing is changing in romantic comedy and that, apart from the process of the sexualization of love that has taken place in the course of the twentieth century,²² the basic premisses of the genre have today the same validity as they did four hundred years ago.²³

Although *The Mirror Has Two Faces* is clearly an example of mainstream cinema and *Chasing Amy* (Kevin Smith, 1997) is an independent film,²⁴ their denouements are not dissimilar. In the latter, the male protagonist Holden (Ben Affleck) lives with his friend Banky (Jason Lee) and falls in love with Alyssa (Joey Lauren Adams), who is a lesbian. The friendship that she offers him is not enough for Holden, nor is it enough for the film since, in a rather surprising scene, Alyssa admits that she too is in love with Holden;

20 Scott O. Swain 'Men's friendships with women: intimacy, sexual boundaries, and the informant role' in Peter M. Nardi (ed.), *Men's Friendships* (London and New Delhi: Sage, 1992), pp. 153–4

21 Krutnik, 'Love lies', pp. 24–8; Peter Evans, 'Meg Ryan superstar', in Evans and Deleyto (eds) *Terms of Endearment* pp. 188–208

22 See Seidman, *Romantic Longings*, pp. 65–90

23 The film's unambiguous identification with this traditional discourse may be one of the reasons for its relatively poor reception. Compare, for example, the \$41m it collected at the US box office with the \$126m that *My Best Friend's Wedding* made the following year with similar budgets of just over \$40m (source: IMDb)

24 And it fared comparatively much better at the US box office: \$12m in receipts for a 'no-budget' of \$250,000 (source: IMDb)

her sexual orientation does not prevent her from submitting to the power of romantic heterosexual love. On the other hand, this heterosexual relationship breaks the friendship between the two men, which, as in *We're No Angels* and *White Men Can't Jump*, is ultimately incompatible with the main relationship. The difference from the other two hybrids of romantic comedy and the male buddy movie is that this one brings to the surface the erotic component of male homosocial relationships. For the rest, although apparently more transgressive, because of the presence in its plot of a great diversity of sexual identities and because of the sexual frankness of the dialogues, the film is, as a whole, not very different from the last two in the homage it pays to the immense power of romantic love and heterosexual desire. Not only does *Chasing Amy* convert the friendship between a man and a woman into love but, in order to do so, it also magically changes the sexual orientation of the woman, thus subscribing to rather traditional heterosexual male discourses about lesbianism.

At first sight, *If Lucy Fell* (Eric Schaeffer, 1996) is similar to the previous films. A man and a woman are room-mates and close friends. Both are desperate because they cannot find the ideal romantic relationship. They promise each other to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge together if, within the space of one month, they have not started a serious romantic heterosexual relationship. At the end of the narrative, disappointed with their respective heterosexual encounters during that month, the two friends, played by Sarah Jessica Parker and Eric Schaeffer, discover that they have really been in love with one another all along. As a consequence, they form the couple that allows the happy ending to occur. Once again, therefore, this film seems to defend the idea that friendship between a man and a woman is only the prelude to romantic love. Yet the performance of the two actors invites a different reading. Rather than suggest that they magically discover they are in love (and that they really had been all the time), Parker's and Schaeffer's construction of their characters in the climactic scene suggests that the love relationships the two characters have had in the course of the film have been so disappointing they have come to realize that romantic love is not the answer. For this reason, they decide to elevate their friendship to the category of 'true relationship'. That is, at the end, instead of love replacing friendship, it is their friendship that consolidates itself as a substitute for love.²⁵

The Object of My Affection (Nicholas Hytner, 1998) starts from a similar premiss, with the added complication that one of the protagonists (the man) is homosexual. Aware of the tendency towards wider emotional spaces shared by both love and friendship in contemporary culture, this film introduces, from its very title, the concept of affection as a middle-of-the-road concept between the other two attachments. Here, Nina (Jennifer Aniston) falls in love

²⁵ After the phenomenal success of the US television series *Sex and the City* (HBO, tx 1998–), it is inevitable retrospectively to read Parker's character in *If Lucy Fell* as an anticipation of Carrie the series' main protagonist. According to this programme's central discourse, friendship is only one of many alternatives to a romantic love which, for its creators, appears to have become frankly residual in contemporary relationships.

26 Again, Jennifer Aniston's presence in this and any other films immediately evokes her part in the sitcom *Friends* – a much more sustained, although not necessarily more insightful, study of the tensions between love and friendship

with George (Paul Rudd), her flatmate, who, because he is gay, can 'only' offer her affection in exchange.²⁶ This affection includes, at the beginning, the promise to help her raise her baby and, in practice, to form a more or less traditional family, minus sex between the parents. There is a moment in which the characters are on the verge of making love and the film threatens to follow a similar road to *Chasing Amy*, but in this case they are interrupted by a phone call from George's old boyfriend. As a consequence, the situation remains unresolved from the point of view of traditional romantic comedy. In the end, this scenario, halfway between love and friendship, is not tenable. So the two characters split and seek shelter in more stable relationships, heterosexual in her case and homoerotic in his. However, the last image of the film is a shot of both of them walking in a New York street with her daughter, an ending which suggests that the affection between them is lasting, and just as important as the stable romantic relationships they have established with other people. Without totally abandoning the conventions of the genre, *The Object of My Affection* once again underlines the crisis of romantic love and heterosexual desire and presents friendship as an increasingly powerful cultural force.

Finally, *The Next Best Thing* (John Schlesinger, 2000) both confirms friendship as a 'fashionable' alternative to romantic love and demonstrates the precariousness of its position within the genre. Initially a combination of the plot premisses of *If Lucy Fell* and *The Object of My Affection*, the film juggles with the usual elements: the contemporary disenchantment (particularly of women) with heterosexual desire, friendship between women and gay men, and sex, together with a new ingredient — pregnancy and parenthood. Abbie (Madonna), tired of failed relationships, has a one-night stand with her gay 'best friend' Robbie, played by Rupert Everett, reprising his part from *My Best Friend's Wedding*, as a consequence of which, in best Hollywood tradition, she becomes pregnant. The film remains within the boundaries of the genre as long as we share the female protagonist's point of view, but when, in an unexpected and rather awkward turn, the main interest of the story veers towards the desire of the male character to keep his child, friendship disappears and comedy turns into melodrama. Ideologically, *The Next Best Thing* may be explained as a warning against 'taking friendship too far' and against friendship usurping the space of love (in the first half of the film, Abbie and Robbie perform the same actions as heterosexual couples: they have sex, form a family and raise their child). It is as if, metaphorically, traditional romantic comedy ritually expels the offending movie from its fold because of the danger posed by friendship to its ideology. In any case, the aggressiveness displayed by the film against heterosocial friendship confirms its relevance in contemporary articulations of the genre. If, in contemporary romantic comedy, male friendship threatens but does

not replace heterosexual love, and female friendship proves ultimately compatible with it (if, in general, ideologically 'superior'), hetero friendship does appear to be too formidable a force for the genre to be able to accommodate it without a struggle. The diversity of the endings of the films discussed here points to a very productive discursive instability in contemporary romantic comedy which, in spite of frequent criticism to the contrary, demonstrates the genre's continuing centrality to the construction of cultural discourses on love

I now briefly return to *My Best Friend's Wedding*. I have tried to demonstrate that while many romantic comedies of the 1990s remain largely loyal to a notion of the uniqueness and the magic of romantic love, many others show a growing mistrust with respect to its viability in a culture in which the social convulsions of the last decades have produced a climate of crisis and a proliferation of socially valid alternatives. The central presence of Everett in this film is, like his subsequent starring role in *The Next Best Thing*, an indication of the degree of social consolidation of some of these changes. The type of homosexuality that he embodies was popular enough to induce the producers to change the ending so that it could include him.²⁷ It could actually be argued that the changes to classical romantic comedy introduced in the film are the direct result of the cultural prestige of the stereotype he represents. Yet the film never actually explores George's sexuality. He is perceived as a gay character because he behaves in a way codified as gay and because he adopts a permanent parodic attitude towards the cultural conventions of heterosexuality. As I have mentioned before, his parodic attitude suggests, in a postmodern manner, both a fascination with the surfaces of romantic love and a questioning of its transcendence. Ultimately, as a form of social interaction, friendship is preferred to love and is revealed as an appropriate substitute in romantic comedy. In the course of the narrative, it has been suggested that Julianne's failures in love are caused by her coldness, her inability to show her feelings and, as usual in contemporary romantic comedy, her tendency to overvalue her career and her personal freedom. Yet in her scenes with George, all of these problems cease to exist, and she is honest, affectionate and sharing. It is significant here that, having become the decade's central romantic comedy icon, Roberts' star persona has evolved towards an image of female independence that makes this film's ending credible.²⁸ It is as if the new climate of social and sexual equality between men and women had rendered heterosexual desire less vital, as if the perfectly codified conventions that have been valid for so long had lost much of their meaning and become nothing more than picturesque museum pieces – to be admired but not believed. Disenchanted by this state of affairs, the genre has started to explore other types of relationships between people and to consider their

27 See David Ehrenstein 'Tea and sympathy', *Premiere*, January 1999 p. 26

28 An evolution which would culminate three years later, in *Erin Brockovich* (Steven Soderbergh 2000)

29 Agnes Heller 'The beauty of friendship', *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 97 no. 1 (1998) special issue on friendship ed. Peter Murphy p. 10

incorporation into its plots. Contradicting Henderson's hasty prediction of the death of romantic comedy in the 1970s, the following two decades have witnessed a massive rebirth of the genre, but this rebirth could not have happened without certain developments. The increasing importance of friendship in the films' plots and resolutions is, as we have seen, one of these developments. Friendships between men, between women, or between men and women have started to proliferate in the space of romantic comedy. We might argue that this type of relationship could never replace love, or that if it did, this would mean the end of romantic comedy, but such predictions would probably prove as misleading as Henderson's. We belong to a culture in which friendship has been in hiding, overpowered by the long-standing dominance of romantic love, but from the Greek philosophers to Renaissance writers, such as Montaigne and La Boétie, friendship was considered the highest form of human relationship. According to Agnes Heller, 'perfect friendship is morally good, and it is also beautiful; it contains and embodies the promise of happiness. It is where virtue and grace, possession and desire, coalesce. Friendship, not erotic love, is the beautiful human relationship'²⁹ As is proved by the special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* in which Heller's article appears, friendship may be on the verge of regaining its former glory, not least because of the ravages our culture has effected on romantic love and sexual desire. In very different ways, films such as *White Men Can't Jump*, *The Truth About Cats and Dogs*, *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion*, *Walking and Talking*, *If Lucy Fell*, *The Object of My Affection* or *My Best Friend's Wedding* evidence not only the growing importance of friendship in romantic comedy but also the constant evolution of a genre which, according to traditional criticism, was supposedly immutable. Both Julianne's experience in the course of *My Best Friend's Wedding* and George's attitude towards heterosexual love are vivid examples of the direction in which romantic comedy evolved in the 1990s, a direction which could not have been envisaged in previous decades. If the spectator identifies with the female protagonist, the happy ending seems to suggest that, even if she has lost her boyfriend, life goes on, romantic comedy goes on and nobody must worry too much if true, eternal, indestructible love has given way to less transcendental, but equally enjoyable, and maybe equally fulfilling, experiences.

Research towards this article has been funded by the DGICYT project no. BFF2001-2564. I would also like to thank Chantal Cornut-Gentile and Constanza del Rio.

Signs of angst and hope: history and melodrama in Chinese fifth-generation cinema

NING MA

Although different methodologies have been used in the study of film genre as a sociocultural process of meaning production conditioned by economic imperatives, artistic conventions, institutional regulation and audience participation, they all turn on a complex configuration of the relationship between the discursive nature of meaning production, its underlying power structure and the formation of subjectivity. They also attempt to relate the formal exposition of the identity of historically specific genres to various forms of identity politics in terms of the binary logic of self/other, conscious/unconscious, masculine/feminine and individual/state. In this respect, the critical studies of Chinese film genres by Chris Berry, Nick Browne and E. Ann Kaplan are exemplary.¹ And yet, with the accelerating pace of globalization in recent years, genre production is increasingly influenced by the paradigms of the postmodern and the postcolonial that challenge any essentialist definition of genre based on binary logic. With the emergence of the post-paradigm come new questions: how should we analyze the form and meaning of genre films whose claim to authentic representation rests less on a manifestation of the national psyche or the collective unconscious than on what Fredric Jameson calls the 'logic of impersonal transnational capital'?² What role can locally produced genre films play in the global cultural economy characterized by what Arjun Appadurai calls 'disjunctures and flows'?³ And what kind of subjectivity, if any, do genre films, which often assume a simulated, hybrid and fractal form, construct for a global audience?

1 Chris Berry 'Neither one thing nor another', in Nick Browne, Paul Pickowicz, Esther Yau and Vivian Sobchack (eds), *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics* (New York: NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 88–113. Nick Browne, 'Society and subjectivity on the political economy of Chinese melodrama', in Browne et al. (eds), *New Chinese Cinemas*, pp. 40–56. E. Ann Kaplan 'Melodrama/subjectivity/ideology: western melodrama theories and their relevance to recent Chinese cinema', in Wimal Dissanayake (ed.), *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* (New York: NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 9–28.

2 Fredric Jameson *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

3 Arjun Appadurai 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy', *Public Culture* vol. 2, no. 2 (1990), pp. 1–24.

The process of globalization has affected Chinese film production in recent years. While most Chinese filmmakers have used generic formulas first tried in Hong Kong or Hollywood to win the support of the domestic audience, the key figures of fifth-generation cinema, with the backing of transnational capital and the patronage of international art cinema, have tried to revamp the established genres in Chinese cinema, such as melodrama and historical film, for global consumption. The films they made have not only won critical acclaim but also generated a lot of debate on the form and meaning of these films and the role they have played in global cultural politics.

While some China-based nativist critics have criticized and denounced these films as a new type of orientalist discourse that legitimates western hegemony over a demonized China, many cosmopolitan critics, most notably Sheldon Lu, have celebrated them as a new transnational third world cinema noted for its oppositional politics.⁴ And yet, despite this critical difference, all of these scholars agree that post-1989 fifth-generation cinema has turned the specificity of Chinese culture and history into a highly marketable generic product for global consumption. As such, an adequate analysis of this cinema has to take into consideration the specific generic conventions deployed in individual films, the intertextual relations they embody, the complex power relations that structure their production and the subject-identity they help to construct in the process of reception.

In this essay I shall address the issues raised above by conducting a genealogical analysis of post-1989 fifth-generation cinema as an exemplary instance of the problematics of transnational genre production. I will first examine the local and global conditions underlying this genre production and the discontinuity and difference it embodies in relation to the dominant Chinese melodramatic discourse. I shall argue that a Foucauldian analysis of post-1989 fifth-generation films as a culturally specific discursive field of power relations can enable us to see them as a new form of 'crosscultural melodrama' noted for its articulation of democratic politics in symbolic response to various totalizing discourses and processes shaping the postmodern world we live in. I shall then illustrate the key features of this new crosscultural melodrama with reference to the concepts of 'effective history' and 'intersubjective history' found in continental European thinking. In the process, I shall also argue that fifth-generation filmmakers' reinvention of melodramatic aesthetics in their transnational film production can also be seen as an attempt to reconstruct a historically specific subject-identity which will have an important role to play in the global cultural politics of the twenty-first century.

⁴ For a summary of the nativist criticism see Ben Xu, 'Farewell My Concubine and its nativist critics', *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1999), pp. 155–70. Sheldon Lu, 'National cinema, cultural critique, transnational capital', in Sheldon Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

Fifth-generation cinema first presented itself as a rejection and critique of the established genres in classical Chinese cinema and its underlying melodramatic aesthetics. The rediscovery of the aesthetic and critical value of melodrama, as in Zhang Yimou's *Judou* (1990) and Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), occurred in the post-1989 era when the conflict between sociopolitical forces unleashed during the initial stage of reform had already come to a head and the subsequent actions taken by the state against the student movement for democracy had brought with them profound political and ethical consequences.

Because of rigid ideological control and censorship, film production critical of the state became almost impossible in the post-1989 era. However, thanks to the new policy of developing a western-style market economy which allowed local talents to be employed by transnational capital, commercially oriented genre production financed by transnational capital based in Hong Kong and Taiwan for the international art cinema market offered itself as an option. Of all genres melodrama was favoured by fifth-generation filmmakers, partly because of its ability to link the personal with the political in gripping stories of crime and passion in which the desire for poetic and social justice is irrepressible, and partly because of the progressive role the genre played in Chinese cultural politics. Thus the fifth generation's belated interest in melodrama can be seen as a highly contingent historical event premised on the Chinese government's brutal suppression of the 1989 democratic revolution and its subsequent embrace of transnational capital.

The process of globalization pioneered by transnational capital had not only brought changes in the institutional and economic aspects of Chinese genre production but also enabled filmmakers to introduce new melodramatic conventions and modes of audience participation in their filmmaking. As such, a close examination of the discontinuity and difference of fifth-generation genre production from the melodramatic aesthetics of both western and Chinese cinema is necessary. Melodrama as an aesthetic mode or cinematic genre has been theorized by scholars like Peter Brooks, Thomas Elsaesser, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and others as a highly theatrical bourgeois art form in which issues of justice and ethics are often raised in a domesticated narrative space within which an Oedipal scenario centred on issues of individual desire and identity in relation to patriarchal law unfolds.⁵ With the increasing pace of globalization, issues concerning the crosscultural nature of melodrama as a modern aesthetic mode and its influence on non-western cinemas and the woman's film have also been put on the critical agenda.⁶

Classical Chinese cinema, as I have argued elsewhere, embodies a melodramatic imagination which is culturally and historically specific

- 5 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: NJ: Yale University Press, 1976); Thomas Elsaesser 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama', *Monogram* no. 4 (1972) pp. 2–15; Geoffrey Nowell-Smith 'Minnelli and melodrama', *Screen* vol. 18 no. 2, pp. 113–18.
- 6 Christian Gledhill, 'Introduction' in Christian Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1998) pp. 1–39.

7 Ning Ma, *Culture and Politics in Chinese Film Melodrama: Traditional Sacred, Moral Economy and the Xie Jin Mode*, (Monash University PhD dissertation 1992)

8 Ning Ma, 'Spatiality and subjectivity in Xie Jin's melodrama of the new period', in Browne et al (eds), *New Chinese Cinemas*, pp 15-39

9 Browne 'Society and subjectivity', pp 40-56

10 Ibid., pp 46-7

in that it is closely linked to the moral economy of Confucian ethics and constitutes a symbolic response to the sociopolitical effects of the transplantation to China of various forms of western modernity, from capitalism to Marxism.⁷ Born around the 1911 republican revolution under the influence of western melodrama, Chinese melodramatic discourse is highly hybridized, exhibiting different forms in different periods ranging from the family ethics films of the 1920s and the leftist films of the 1930s to Xie Jin's melodrama of the Mao and post-Mao period. Features such as cultural specificity, historicity and hybridity that characterize Chinese melodrama as a crosscultural form also problematize the dominant psychoanalytic conception of melodrama in the West and any attempt to use the binary logic to characterize melodrama as belonging to a particular class, gender or culture.

The dominant position Xie Jin's melodrama occupies in mainstream Chinese cinema has to do with a skilful use of western melodramatic conventions within a culturally specific narrative paradigm in which the articulation of individual desire and subject-identity is conditioned by the deployment of a set of symbolic divisions valorized by the traditional Chinese patriarchal order.⁸ The popularity of this melodrama, despite glaring evidence of its incoherence and contradictions, is due to an ingenious use of moral expressivity which not only constitutes a discursive field wherein the established power relations can be reversed, but also helps to construct a group-oriented subject-identity in line with the traditional Chinese symbolic order in response to rapid sociopolitical changes brought about by reform and an open-door policy.

Focusing on the sociohistorical inscription found in Xie Jin's melodrama, Browne has characterized it as a form of political melodrama that differs from western melodrama in terms of its ethical-political conception of the individual and her relationship to the state as a matter of justice in both private and public spaces.⁹ In Xie Jin's melodrama, the issue of justice is not posed in terms of individual freedom and rights but as a set of conventions, social relations, and transactions within the group. Furthermore, premised on a definition of the self in relation to the social as a fully public matter, this political melodrama embodies a mode of historical experience, which Browne argues:

inscribes 'subjectivity' in a position between the expectation of an ethical system (Confucianism) and the demands of a political system (socialism), a condition that typifies the Chinese dilemma of modernization. The form's principal significance lies in the affective dimension of the self's relation to the social order, catalyzing two affective regimes that are acted out in the narrative as intensified performances of betrayal, disappointment, or defeat.¹⁰

Xie Jin's political melodrama, and the popularity it enjoyed among

the local audience, can be seen as a powerful sign of the aspirations and frustrations of the people caught in the process of reform and modernization.

Transnationally financed post-1989 fifth-generation melodrama forms a complex intertextual relationship with this dominant melodramatic discourse. As the work of Jenny Lau, W.A. Callahan, Shuqin Cui, and E. Ann Kaplan demonstrates, post-1989 fifth-generation films are noted for their foregrounding of culturally specific notions of gender and gendered perspectives, melodramatic treatment of Oedipal desire and conflict, dazzling display of Chinese sexuality and ethnicity, allegorical readings of Chinese culture and history, and symbolic responses to traumas of various kinds ranging from the cultural revolution of 1966 to the democratic revolution of 1989.¹¹ Furthermore, as instances of the transnational production of ethnicity catering to the needs and desires of the international art cinema audience, this form of melodrama could be read, as Rey Chow argues, from a postcolonial perspective as the sign of 'a cross-cultural commodity fetishism' and 'exhibitionism' that projects a subalternized and exoticized China under 'the gaze of orientalist surveillance'.¹² However, a close analysis of the specific generic conventions deployed in these films and of the ways in which they facilitate audience participation in meaning production shows them to constitute a new form of crosscultural melodrama noted for its articulation of democratic politics in sharp contrast to Xie Jin's melodrama.

Melodrama as orientalized Oedipal story

A major difference between this new crosscultural melodrama and that of Xie Jin is its dramatization of the disastrous consequences of the assertion of individual freedom and rights through the deployment of an orientalized Oedipal story and its exploration of patriarchal law as that of 'big brother' in modern China. Zhang Yimou's *Judou* (1990), for instance, tells a story about a fatherless son, Yang Tianqing, who not only fathers a son through an illicit love affair with his uncle's wife Judou (Gong Li) but also takes over his uncle's booming business with dire consequences. The film highlights the identity problem Yang Tianqing's nuclear family faces due to the imposition of 'big brother' law by the village elders. The form and function of this new law is explored in *Raise the Red Lantern* (1992) in terms of a feminine version of the Oedipal story: a fatherless girl named Songlian is forced to marry Master Chen as his fourth concubine and aspires to the position of the matriarch with disastrous results. Focusing on female rivalry set within a walled-in family compound with watch towers and a death chamber, the film reveals in vivid details how female desire and sexuality are ordered

11 Jenny Kwok Wah Lau 'Judou – a hermeneutical reading of cross-cultural cinema' *Film Quarterly*, vol 45, no 2 (1991), pp 2–10, and 'Farewell My Concubine' history melodrama, and ideology in contemporary pan-Chinese cinema *Film Quarterly* vol 49 no 1 (1995) pp 16–27, W.A. Callahan, 'Gender ideology, nation *Judou* in the cultural politics of China', *East-West Film Journal*, vol 7 no 1 (1993) pp 52–80, Shuqin Cui, 'Gendered perspective the construction and representation of subjectivity and sexuality in *Judou*', in Lu (ed.), *National cinema*, pp 303–20 E. Ann Kaplan, 'Reading formations and Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine*' in Lu (ed.), *National cinema* pp 265–75

12 Rey Chow, *Primitive Passion* (New York, NY Columbia University Press 1995), p 170

by visual surveillance, hierarchical ordering and violent repression. Touches of realism and contemporaneity are added in *The Story of Qiu Ju* (1993), which is about a peasant woman's courageous attempt to sue the village chief Wang for causing injury to her husband's reproductive organs in a row. The dramatization of the destructive effects of the patriarchal suppression of individual rights centres on Qiu Ju's pregnant body.

The orientalized Oedipal story in Chen Kaige's films is concerned with the formation of aberrant personalities due to an excessive use of symbolic and physical violence sanctioned by the Chinese patriarchal order. A melodrama about the lives of two Peking opera actors, *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) focuses on the role played by institutionalized violence in turning Chinese males into feminized subjects. The law of the father as that of big brother reveals itself most effectively in the ways in which symbolic and physical violence is executed. A melodramatic story about family succession set during the Republican revolution, *Temptress Moon* (1996) not only examines the sociohistorical factors contributing to the problem of the feminization of the Chinese males, but also traces the spectacular rise of patriarchal law as that of big brother in modern China. Opium-smoking has not only weakened the male members of a big feudal family in China but also claimed both the male and female heirs as its latest victims, so that a feminized brother chosen by the family elders becomes the new patriarch. *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1999) offers a scathing critique of the Chinese patriarchal order by retelling a historical narrative about the first emperor of China and the sociopolitical system he established more than two thousand years ago. As an epic-length historical film, the narrative focus is placed on the contradictory relationship between the first emperor and his mother and her illicit lovers on the one hand, and, on the other, his special relationship with Zhao Nu, a friend since childhood whom he treats as a sister. The film reveals that it is through brutal killings of his mother's illicit lovers, including his own father who serves under him as prime minister, and all those who know about his illegitimate birth that his ambitious plan to unify China and to place it under totalitarian rule is achieved.

Melodrama as effective history

Discontinuity and difference can also be found in the ways in which history figures in these post-1989 films. In Xie Jin's melodrama, history functions largely as an objective and inexorable process embodying a progressive moral framework which not only helps the viewer to make sense of the melodramatic conflicts depicted but is also instrumental in bringing the narrative to closure. In post-1989 fifth-generation films, history most often manifests itself in terms of

the consequences and effects of the patriarchal suppression of individual assertion, dramatized in a narrative full of sudden reversals and ironic twists. There is also an attempt to re-introduce the ancient yin–yang view of history as an eternal flux or the Nietzschean notion of the eternal return to problematize the conventional progressive view of history.

Such a treatment of history is similar to Michel Foucault's notion of effective history in his genealogical analysis of how power works in the production of historical knowledge.¹³ According to Foucault, effective history differs from traditional history in that it rejects notions of continuity, objectivity, totality and closure. History becomes 'effective' to the degree that 'it introduces discontinuity into our very being – as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself' ¹⁴ Effective history seeks to 'uproot its traditional foundations' by showing that 'the forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms but respond to haphazard conflicts' ¹⁵ In effective history, the world we know cannot be subjected to a simple configuration where events can be reduced to accentuate their essential traits and final meanings. Furthermore, effective history can invert the relationship that traditional history establishes between proximity and distance, and between abstract concepts and concrete historical existence. It does not aspire to be a handmaiden to philosophy by using terms such as 'the noblest periods, the highest forms, the most abstract ideas, the purest individualities', but seeks to become 'a curative science' by focusing on what is the nearest and dearest, the human body as it is moulded by a great many distinct regimes, broken down by the rhythms of work, rest and holidays, poisoned by food or values, and by constructing resistance.¹⁶

Another important feature of effective history, according to Foucault, is its affirmation of knowledge as perspective. Historians usually hide or erase the elements in their historical writing which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy. Effective history is explicit in its perspective. It is not given to a discreet effacement before the objects and events it observes. It is highly self-conscious about historical writing as a perspectival use of documents for political purposes. It does not seek to establish laws but tries to highlight the power relations at work in the production of historical knowledge. As Foucault puts it, in effective history, 'knowledge is not made for understanding, it is made for cutting' ¹⁷

The key features of effective history can also be seen as the hallmarks of post-1989 fifth-generation melodrama. For instance, by elevating the notion of history as a vicious cycle or a wanton process to that of a formal organizing principle, the filmmakers in their representation of Chinese culture and history seek to foreground the

13 Michel Foucault 'Nietzsche genealogy, history', in Lawrence Cahoon (ed.) *From Modernism to Postmodernism* (Cambridge Blackwell 1996), pp. 360–78

14 Ibid., p. 370

15 Ibid., pp. 370–71

16 Ibid., pp. 371–2

17 Ibid., p. 370

theme of discontinuity through the use of melodramatic conventions of narrative reversals and twists. Subjectivity is achieved in these films through the deployment of an orientalised Oedipal story dramatizing the destructive effects of the patriarchal suppression of individual desire and subjectivity. The critique of totality finds its strongest expression in a symbolic use of the *mise-en-scène* elements to reveal a prison-like social environment within which individual characters live. The rejection of closure is clearly seen in the refusal to reward the good and punish the evil at the end of the narrative.

Post-1989 melodrama also aspires to be a curative science by focusing on the human body as it is split by unconscious desire, torn between family demands and social obligation and moulded by different regimes. Concerned with the ways in which various totalizing discourses endorsed by the Chinese state affect the lives of ordinary people, the fifth-generation melodrama not only seeks to represent the human body as the inscribed surface of sociohistorical processes and the bearer of an impersonal and brutal force of social totality, but also resorts to the use of performative rhetoric of the body to highlight the destructive effects of the imposition of patriarchal law as that of big brother, upon which the new state is founded.

What is crucial to *Judou*, for instance, is the performative rhetoric articulated by Gong Li within the walled-in family compound with its dyeing pools, machines, stairways and cloths of white, red and blue. Abused by her husband and under the voyeuristic gaze of Yang Tianqing, Judou decides to let the latter see her bruised body as she bathes, and subsequently lures him into a productive love affair. Such is Gong Li's performance in love-making within the dyeing factory that it not only functions to confer legality and vitality on their love affair by integrating it into the reproductive cycle of the family business, but also adds new meanings to her body; it can be interpreted as a symbolic rendering of the workings of the libidinal economy of the female psyche on one level, and an objective reminder of the emergence of a booming private sector within a nominal socialist state in contemporary China on another. Thus it is no surprise to find that the destructive effects of the imposition on the characters of patriarchal law as that of big brother are first registered by her body. Fear of public opinion and sanction drives a pregnant Judou to use drugs to abort the second baby, only to have her reproductive organs damaged and her family business destroyed.

Such an effective use of the human body can also be found in other fifth-generation films. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, the performative rhetoric of the body is articulated in conjunction with *mise-en-scène* elements to dramatize the destructive effects of patriarchal ordering of female desire and subjectivity in terms of what the female characters and their servants do to their own and their rivals' bodies. The competition between the concubines to

increase their attractiveness through makeup, hairstyle and dress, to achieve sexual arousal through body inspection and massage, and to increase their chances of becoming pregnant, eventually causes the death of two women and physical and psychological damage to the others.

Fifth-generation filmmakers also tend to adopt a highly perspectival and self-conscious mode of narration, foregrounding subjective reinterpretations of Chinese culture, history and identity as well as the consequences of character actions dictated by both external and internal forces. As effective history these films are also about effects in search of causes, consequences in search of solutions. As symbolic responses to the tragic events in Beijing in 1989, the causes sought by the filmmakers are shown to be both internal and external, social and psychological, inferrable and yet indeterminate. In their films, those who have caused suffering to the characters turn out to be their own relatives or close friends. In *Farewell My Concubine*, for instance, the characters responsible for the symbolic castration and rape are Cheng Dieyi's mother and his closest friend in the Peking Opera Troupe. In *To Live*, the person who has caused the death of Fugui's only son turns out to be his former assistant in the shadow play troupe, now a Communist official returning home to work for the local community.

Such a perspectival approach to melodramatic narrative as effective history becomes more meaningful if we take into consideration Foucault's interpretation of events in effective history. According to Foucault, an event

is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked 'other'.

In effective history the world as 'a profusion of entangled events' is ruled by 'the iron hand of necessity shaking the dice-box of chance' and 'chance is not simply the drawing of lots, but raising the stakes in every attempt to master chance through the will to power'.¹⁸ Thus it is necessary for us to examine how events are ordered and put into perspective in the process of narration. *To Live* opens in a gambling house where Fugui, the prodigal son of a rich family, is busy shaking the dice-box and raising the stakes in a deadly gamble with Long'er without knowing the game is rigged. Losing both his father and his family estate, Fugui gives up gambling to become a shadow play artist. As an epic-length melodrama in which the ups and downs of his life as an artist are closely related to drastic changes in power relations between hostile political forces, the use of performative rhetoric, in conjunction with a highly perspectival and self-reflexive mode of narration in the film,

18 Ibid., pp. 370–71

functions to dramatize the point that although Fugui and the ordinary folks he entertains are given a new lease of life with each regime, they remain very much like the puppets in the shadow play theatre, whose actions are dictated by the will of the state.

In *Farewell My Concubine*, the eventful life of the two actors is re-enacted retrospectively in a dress rehearsal of the title play in an empty sports stadium, right after the ending of the cultural revolution when the two actors have just been rehabilitated. This re-enactment is clearly discernible as a sado-masochistic narrative of suffering and loss structured in terms of a shifting relationship between subject and object, masculine and feminine, active and passive, constructed along an axis of seeing and being seen that gives full play to the voyeuristic and exhibitionist tendencies inherent in film viewing theorized by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith.¹⁹ This not only adds an extra dimension of psychic fantasy to the cinematic narration, but is also indicative of the kind of audience targeted by the film as a transnational commercial production. This sado-masochistic representation is also somewhat self-reflexive. The re-enactment of the actors' life story is watched by a gatekeeper, who constitutes the only member of the audience in the sports stadium. The presence of this lone figure, who professes to be a fan, not only foreshadows the theme of double confinement and imprisonment that recurs in the film but is also a highly symbolic figuration of the 'will to power' that can manifest itself in different ways in world politics. Thus the search for causation in these films is also a search for new ways to understand and represent the workings of the Chinese patriarchal order as a specific configuration of the will to power in world history.

19 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith 'A note on "history/discourse"' in John Caughie (ed.), *Theories of Authorship* (London: Routledge 1981) pp. 232–41.

From a language of the body to a language of the spirit

Discontinuity and difference can also be detected in the ways in which moral expressivity, formal excess and emotional appeal function in fifth-generation melodrama in relation to dominant Chinese melodramatic discourse. Xie Jin's melodrama, for instance, is noted for its excessive play with Confucian ethical codes and Communist political codes for moral clarification and expressivity. The function of the performative rhetoric is to articulate virtuous suffering, which arouses audience sympathy and contributes to the final vindication of the victim when a new regime comes to power. By contrast, moral expressivity in fifth-generation melodrama is typically articulated in terms of a critical exploration of the ways in which traditional ideologies shape the lives of the characters and contribute to their own suffering. Performative rhetoric is often used to dramatize the difficulty of the body split by unconscious desire, moulded by different regimes and manipulated by different totalizing

discourses to make categorical moral and political statements. The emphasis on the difficulty of using a socioculturally constructed body to articulate clear-cut moral meanings contributes greatly to an overwhelming sense of angst pervading post-1989 fifth-generation melodramas.

It remains to be asked how these films articulate moral meanings in an excessive way and where we can locate the Manichean conflict and the process of victimization and vindication that melodrama as a genre embodies, so that a sense of hope can be rekindled. In attempting to answer this, we can see more clearly how the filmmakers have tried to reinvent the melodramatic aesthetics by introducing into their films a new mode of moral expressivity founded not so much on a psychoanalytically-based language of the body as on a language of the spirit.

The concept of the spirit or *geist* developed in continental European thinking about the morally oriented social and human sciences lays emphasis on the constitutive role played by ideas, mental processes, language and cultural formations as historically formed intersubjective structures in producing knowledge, culture and identity. While Foucault, following Nietzsche, uses a genealogical approach to human history as effective history in order to explore the complex relationship between knowledge and power in discursive practices, Hans-Georg Gadamer uses concepts such as effective history and the fusion of historical horizons in his hermeneutic approach to artistic production, and thus the *geist* as intersubjectivity becomes the means by which the truth claims of an artistic discourse can be analyzed in the process of reception.²⁰ A more radical approach is adopted by Jürgen Habermas in his attempt to relocate the *geist* as intersubjectivity in historically formed democratic institutions such as the public spheres that favour the use of communicative rationality rather than instrumental rationality as the means for constructing commonly accepted notions of truth, justice and ethics.²¹

The concept of the spirit as a historically formed intersubjective structure or intersubjective history informed by the writings of Gadamer and Habermas can help us understand better the process of moral clarification in fifth-generation melodrama as effective history, and the contribution this melodrama can make to democratic politics in China. This is because the combination of melodramatic and historical narrative discourses in post-1989 fifth-generation film production also creates various kinds of intersubjective spaces in which moral expressivity is achieved through a clash of different perspectives. In *Farewell My Concubine*, for instance, a culturally specific melodramatic discourse unfolds in terms of an ingenious play with traditional Chinese ethical terms such as right as *dui* (meaning a correct pairing or coupling in Chinese) and wrong as *budui* (an incorrect pairing or coupling) with regard to individual identity in

²⁰ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming (New York: NY: Seabury Press, 1975).

²¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

gender, class and ethnic terms in various sociocultural contexts. These range from confusion over the difference between the gender of the actor and the gender of the role played, to the triangular problem between coupling onstage and coupling offstage involving the Manchu rulers, Japanese invaders, the nationalists and the Communists in modern Chinese history. And it is through a fusion of these different historical contexts or horizons that new interpretations of traditional notions of right as *dui* and wrong as *budui*, with regard to the life stories of the characters, can be constructed in the process of reception. For instance, the attempt to resort to singular masculine power to shape history, which is foregrounded in the historical play about Bawang in the film, is counterpointed by the tragedy of submissive femininity that infects all the characters in the Peking Opera Troupe. Whereas the historical play highlights the status of Bawang as a classical example of the will to power, the flashback story about the lives of the actors impersonating Bawang and his concubine delineates the two as victims of male aggression. While the disciplinary training the two actors have received before they reach stardom is shown to be administered for their own good, it is also responsible for their mental state and their suffering during the cultural revolution. Since the life stories of two actors are re-enacted retrospectively in a dress rehearsal, it becomes a contemporary version of the classical play about the assertion of masculine will to power. The question repeatedly raised in the narrative as to who is the real Bawang and who is his real concubine in different historical contexts also becomes an open one, inviting different answers from the viewers in the process of reception.

The same can also be said about Zhang Yimou's *To Live*. An example of the intersection of the historical and the melodramatic discourses functioning as an inter-subjective space in which moral meanings can be articulated in an excessive way occurs in the childbirth scene, when Fengxia's worker-turned-Red Guard husband stages an attack on Doctor Wang in the hospital corridor in order to get him to help with their emergency. It is ironic that days of starvation followed by a bout of overeating cause Wang's body to suffer digestive problems at the precise moment that Fengxia, who is under the care of ignorant Red Guard medical students, experiences a post-natal haemorrhage. Different perspectives are introduced in relation to Fengxia's bleeding body through the use of mise-en-scene elements. Previously married to a member of the Red Guard under the benign gaze of a portrait of Mao in Red Guard uniform, she now lies dying in a pool of blood, at the hands of Red Guards pretending to be doctors, another portrait of Mao over her hospital bed, while the real doctor is suffering from the attentions of her Red Guard husband in the corridor outside the ward. It is through an ingenious play with the concept of wrong as *budui* in Chinese in

relation to different historical perspectives that moral expressivity is achieved.

Self-consciousness, self-knowledge and subject-identity

The intersubjective spaces created in these films for moral clarification also constitute the very site where a subject-identity based on new ethical and political norms can be formed. This is because the combination of historical and melodramatic discourses not only generates different perspectives on modern Chinese culture and politics, it also creates a mirroring structure in the narrative that can send the spectator on a journey of self-discovery and self-knowledge. Placed at the centre of the intersubjective spaces is the cinematic representation of the suffering body with which audience identification is made either possible or impossible. The force of such a cinematic representation can be most strongly felt in various screen roles of Gong Li as Judou, whose bruised body arouses feelings of sympathy among the audience, as Songlian, through whose eyes in *Raise the Red Lantern* the audience discovers the murders committed in the name of law and order, as a justice-seeking pregnant woman in *The Story of Qiu Jiu*, dressed in a man's suit and accompanied by her sister in the tricolour of blue, white and red; as the pregnant Juxian in *Farewell My Concubine*, who risks her life to protect her husband and suffers a miscarriage, as Zhao Nu, who has her face scarred for the cause of unification and eventually turns against the tyranny established by the First Emperor in China.

The mirroring structure deployed in these representations of the body introduces a highly self-conscious mode of viewing. Such a cinematic practice has its precedents in 1930s melodramatic films such as *Street Angel* (Yuan Muzhi, 1937) and *Crossroads* (Shen Xileng, 1937) made by leftwing filmmakers under the influence of Lu Xun, who first advocated the use of literature as a curative science by creating fictional characters to remind the Chinese readers how ignorant and backward they are in a rapidly changing modern world.²² Retelling the story by Lu Xun about being a film spectator under colonial conditions as a way of showing how 'self-consciousness' is produced in the postcolonial 'third world', Rey Chow argues that this self-consciousness is also a consciousness of one's identity in a world constructed by the modern technological medium of visuality and the 'menaces' it brings to people brought up in traditional, literary culture in terms of various kinds of violence, ranging from military conquest to the colonization of the mind.²³ As she elaborates.

Lu Xun discovers what it means to 'be Chinese' in the modern world by watching film. Because it is grounded in an apprehension

²² See Ning Ma, 'The textual and critical difference of being radical: reconstructing Chinese leftist films of the 1930s', *Wide Angle*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1989), pp. 22–31.

²³ Chow, *Primitive Passion*, p. 9.

of the aggressiveness of the technological medium of visuality, self-consciousness henceforth could not be separated from a certain violence that splits the self, in the very moment it becomes 'conscious,' into seeing and the seen 'Being Chinese' would henceforth carry in it the imagistic memory – the memorable image – of this violence National self-consciousness is thus not only a matter of watching 'China' being represented on screen, it is, more precisely, watching oneself – as a film, as a spectacle, as something always already watched.²⁴

However, the self-consciousness exhibited by fifth-generation films does not simply represent a new national consciousness but a space of intersubjectivity, where the boundaries of gender, class, ethnicity or nationality can be transcended and contributions to democratic politics made *To Live*, for instance, is noted for its ironic juxtaposition of the victor's view, inherent in a historical discourse that foregrounds significant public events in modern Chinese history, and the loser's view, in a melodramatic treatment that highlights the destructive effects which the totalizing discursive practices endorsed by the state have on the characters While the film dramatizes Fugui's sufferings in various political campaigns ordered by government officials, it does not advocate revenge but forgiveness Furthermore, the deployment of an epic story, marked by sudden reversals and ironic parallels, also helps both the characters and the viewers to experience the plight of an excluded or persecuted other and achieve a better understanding of the other as another human being in need of human rights protection.

The discursive space, within which the drama about self-consciousness, self-knowledge and self-identity is staged, is also the intersubjective space where moral expressivity is articulated through a combination of historical and melodramatic discourses. While historical narrative discourse in fifth-generation cinema may function as a kind of historical documentation, it is also highly subjective and melodramatic, similar to Walter Benjamin's notion of history as intersubjectivity, of which he writes

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.²⁵

25 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of history' in Hannah Arendt (ed. and trans.) *Illuminations* (New York: NY Schoichens, 1969), p. 255

In his hermeneutic readings of history, Benjamin not only emphasizes the intersubjectivity of historical writing but also highlights its nature as the embodiment of a morally oriented Manichean conflict of biblical proportions. For that matter, the subject of history for him is also a melodramatic subject. The same can also be said about post-1989 fifth-generation films. To illustrate this, I shall focus finally on the dangers and hopes alluded to in films such as *To Live* and *Farewell My Concubine*. The danger highlighted in *To Live* is that of totalitarianism in various forms. The film opens in a gambling house controlled by Long'er, the owner of the shadow play theatre. While Fugui believes he is still a respected master and can do whatever he wants, including leaving the gambling table and changing the contents of the shadow play, he has been set up by the real master Long'er to lose everything. This opening sets the tone for the rest of the film, which shows that the sufferings Fugui and his family have to endure are more or less related to a social environment totally controlled by outside political forces.

While an overwhelming sense of angst and fear pervades this film, it also shows signs of hope. For instance, earlier in the film, after Long'er takes over Fugui's house, he nevertheless helps the latter to earn a living by offering him his own puppet kit. Towards the end of the film, although the puppets have been burned, the chest which held them is now a home for a new brood of chicks to be raised by Fugui's grandson. The whole family visits the tombs of the dead, talking about past traumas and future plans. The film ends with a long-shot of the surviving family members gathering together for dinner. The Red Guard son-in-law moves from his position at the table, screen right, as he prepares dinner for his bed-ridden mother-in-law Jiazheng (Gong Li), screen left, while the credits printed in blue roll from screen left to screen right. As a signifier of family reunion, the shot refers the audience to similar shots of family reunion at the end of many other Chinese melodramatic films. The symbolic use of tricolour also evokes in audience memories the three basic principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, that inspired the French revolution during which melodrama as an aesthetic mode was first born.

The melodrama in *Farewell My Concubine* unfolds within closed compounds of various kinds, from the sports stadium watched over by a lone gatekeeper to the heavily guarded Peking Opera school. Unable to endure the inhuman disciplinary training at the school, Cheng Dieyi tries to run away only to find that the outside world is nothing but a larger theatrical stage surrounded by powerful patrons who desire his castration. The pervading sense of angst and fear has much to do with this double confinement in which characters either live in submission and conformity or commit suicide in despair. It also points to totalitarianism in its various forms as the main danger.

The memories that flash up at a moment of danger in the film occur near the end of the film when Duan Xiaolou addresses Cheng Dieyi as Xiao Douzhi in order to evoke in Cheng Dieyi memories of the days when they were fellow students in the Peking Opera school. This address also refers to character actions depicted in earlier scenes, where certain universal principles are embodied: liberty symbolized by the kites outside the Peking Opera school gates when Shitou the gatekeeper allows Douzhi and his pal to run away, equality symbolized by the sharing of quilts in a scene when Shitou, unlike other students, refuses to discriminate against Douzhi just because he was born in a brothel, and fraternity symbolized by the various kinds of help they offer each other in adverse situations. This address offers a discursive marker of a new form of subjectivity or subject-identity formed historically in relation to European Enlightenment ideals and values.

That totalitarianism is the ultimate danger is clarified further in *The Emperor and the Assassin*, in which European Enlightenment ideals are notable in their total absence. The theme of individual identity formed in relation to instrumental vision as the vehicle for self-discovery and self-knowledge is figured in Zhao Nu, who has her face disfigured in a scheme to win the confidence of the prince of the Yan State in North China in order to achieve political unification. Witnessing scene after scene of killing and massacre, she realizes that political unification can never be achieved through totalitarian means. To avoid further bloodshed, she helps Jingke to assassinate the First Emperor and is ultimately forced into exile. Textualized in the filmic body, as well as in the bodies of the main characters, in terms of scars and wounds, angst and fear, this symbolic response to a rapidly changing world shaped by the will to power becomes the most noticeable feature of this epic film.

The significance of post-1989 fifth-generation cinema lies in its attempt to create a new kind of crosscultural melodrama noted for its articulation of democratic politics in symbolic response to various totalizing sociohistorical discursive practices shaping our postmodern world. The form and meaning of this crosscultural melodrama can be illustrated with reference to the orientalized Oedipal story deployed in individual films that functions to dramatize the effects and consequences of the imposition of patriarchal law as that of big brother in China. The form and meaning of this melodrama can also be analyzed with reference to the concept of effective history, which rejects continuity, objectivity, totality and closure and aspires to be a curative science of the human body. Central to fifth-generation melodrama as effective history is a highly melodramatic representation of the body as the inscribed surface of sociohistorical events and the bearer of an impersonal and brutal force of social

totality, which enables the viewer to interpret the functioning of Chinese patriarchal order as a specific configuration of the will to power in world history

Moral expressivity in this new crosscultural melodrama is founded not so much on a psychoanalytically based language of the body as that of the spirit. Understood as an intersubjective discursive space, this language of the spirit provides filmmakers with a valuable discursive space in which issues concerning truth, justice and ethics, affecting characters as well as audience, can offer new perspectives on the process of reception. The cognitive value of this transnational generic production has little to do with its manifestation of national psyche or the logic of transnational capital but much to do with its use of intersubjective spaces for the articulation of democratic politics. Fifth-generation melodrama as effective history also gives heightened expression to people's fears and hopes by representing the Manichean conflict featured in its melodramatic narrative as a conflict between totalitarianism and democracy in a global context, in which European Enlightenment ideals function as a basis not only for social justice but also for the construction of new subject-identities. This melodramatic aesthetic reinvented by the fifth-generation filmmakers will have an important role to play in the global cultural politics of the twenty-first century

This essay is a revised version of a paper presented at the conference *Cinema and Senses* at the University of New South Wales, Australia, in November 1998. I would like to thank Peter McGregor, Michael Helfand, Lucy Fischer, Sheldon Lu and other readers of my manuscript.

Victimage and violence: *Memento* and trauma theory

PETER THOMAS

- 1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Volume I (1739) (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1964), p. 542

- 2 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992), p. 127

- 3 F.R. Ankersmit, 'Historiography and postmodernism', *History and Theory*, vol. 28, no. 2 (1989), p. 138

- 4 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism', *New Left Review*, no. 146 (1984), p. 64

*Had we no memory, we never shou'd have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person.*¹

*When survivors recognize the origins of their psychological difficulties in an abusive childhood environment, they no longer need attribute them to an inherent defect in the self. Thus the way is opened to the creation of new meaning in experience and a new, unstigmatized identity.*²

*It has been calculated that at this moment there are more historians occupied with the past than the total number of historians from Herodotus up until 1960.*³

A number of writers have suggested that trauma theory is being approached as if it can solve the longstanding conflict in film studies between the theoretical imperative to doubt referentiality and thereby lose history, and the rival imperative to commit politically, which requires a sense of history. The longstanding focus on historical records and written histories *as texts* has led to a great scepticism about using any form of evidence to gain referential access to the past, and of any historical representation which has been so incautious as to do so. As far back as 1984 this had already led Fredric Jameson to write that:

*In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed out, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts.*⁴

Obviously, this has presented something of a problem when it comes to affirming the reality and/or truth of politically significant past events, such as the patriarchal oppression of women, colonialism or the Holocaust. It is into this problematic that trauma theory is currently inserting itself; Cathy Caruth, a pioneer in the field, wrote in 1991 that:

Recent literary criticism has shown an increasing concern that the epistemological problems raised by poststructuralist criticism, in particular deconstruction, necessarily lead to political and ethical paralysis. The possibility that reference is indirect, and that consequently we may not have direct access to others', or even our own, histories, seems to imply the impossibility of any access to other cultures, and hence any means of making political or ethical judgments. To such an argument I would like to contrast . . . the peculiar and paradoxical experience of trauma.⁵

More recently, in considering trauma theory's impact on film studies, Thomas Elsaesser has also linked its appeal to this offer of a road to the recovery of reference.⁶ But trauma theory's appeal is not that of just *any* road to the recovery of reference, it is that of a theoretically complex and respectable one relative to poststructuralism and deconstruction. To paraphrase Caruth, trauma theory is the deconstruction that does not lead to political and ethical paralysis.⁷

At the moment it seems that trauma theory could become an important force in film studies. 2001 was a significant year for trauma theory. In January *Postmodern Cultures* gave over a whole issue to it, including an interview with Jean Laplanche by Caruth,⁸ and *Cultural Values* published a special issue on 'Testimonial Cultures', featuring articles by Caruth and Susannah Radstone.⁹ Further, the 'Reports and debates' section of that summer's *Screen* featured a 'Trauma dossier' edited by Radstone, featuring work by Elsaesser, E. Ann Kaplan, Maureen Turim and Janet Walker.¹⁰ The near future promises books using trauma theory from Elsaesser and Walker, and a co-edited volume from Kaplan.¹¹ In examining what Radstone has called the 'general rush to trauma',¹² this article will focus on the appeal of arguments that traumatic memory can allow privileged access to the past, what Janice Haaken has called the 'key to the kingdom',¹³ focusing on the treatment of referentiality, modernist and postmodernist aesthetics, fantasy and the ambiguous role of interpretation, empiricism and narrative. The analysis will then shift to the recent film *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), which deals in a proximate way with the vexed problem of the difficulty of knowing and the need to know. Haaken has noted that 'if trauma memory is stored differently in the brain than is ordinary, narrative memory, as trauma theorists claim, then the question of how trauma memory is transformed into narrative memory remains "repressed" by the theory'.¹⁴ *Memento* offers a close engagement

5 Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed experience: trauma and the possibility of history', *Yale French Studies*, no. 79, (1991), p. 181

6 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), p. 201

7 Noted in *ibid*

8 See Cathy Caruth, 'An interview with Jean Laplanche', *Postmodern Cultures*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2001).

9 See Cathy Caruth, 'Parting words: trauma, silence and survival', and Susannah Radstone, 'Social bonds and psychological order: testimonies', both *Cultural Values*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2001), pp. 59-78

10 See Susannah Radstone, 'Trauma and screen studies: opening the debate', Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', E. Ann Kaplan, 'Melodrama, cinema and trauma', Maureen Turim, 'The trauma of history: flashbacks upon flashbacks', Janet Walker, 'Trauma cinema: false memories and true experience', all *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), pp. 188-216

11 E. Ann Kaplan and Ben Wang (eds), *Trauma and Modernity: Transnational Cinemas in Historical Perspective*

(forthcoming). Elseesser is working on a book on New German Cinema and trauma theory, and Walker is writing a book on trauma cinema. Radstone, 'Special debate trauma and screen studies', p. 189, fn. 4

- 12 Radstone, 'Trauma and screen studies', p. 189. Radstone has speculated that 'Victim culture, that is, as well as the academic appeal of trauma theory might be better understood as symptoms of, rather than as analyses of traumatic memory' (emphasis in original). Susannah Radstone, 'Screening trauma: *Forrest Gump*, film and memory', in Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 94

- 13 Janice Haaken, 'The recovery of memory, fantasy and desire: feminist approaches to sexual abuse and psychic trauma', *Signs*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1996), p. 1076.

- 14 Ibid., p. 1079

- 15 Mary Harvey and Judith Herman, 'Amnesia, partial amnesia, and delayed recall among adult survivors of childhood trauma', in Kathy Pezdek and William P. Banks (eds), *The Recovered Memory/False Memory Debate* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1996), p. 30. Haaken, 'The recovery of memory', pp. 1069–78. Holocaust memory was also a significant focus – the discourse around child sexual abuse had already linked itself to that around the Holocaust. Haaken, 'The recovery of memory', p. 1070, fn. 9. Paul Antze, 'Telling stories, making selves', in Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (eds), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 9

- 16 Harvey and Herman, 'Amnesia, partial amnesia', p. 30. Haaken, 'The recovery of memory', pp. 1069–90. Haaken also mentions the place of recovered memories of satanic ritual abuse (SRA) in the procedure's wider credibility problems. Ian Hacking notes that some Protestant fundamentalist sects are also critical of the False Memory

specifically with this act of reading narrative from fragments and absences, and with the stakes of this reading.

When trauma theory entered humanities discourse, it focused particularly on the US controversy over recovered memories of sexual abuse in childhood.¹⁵ These were cases where no conscious memory accompanied the symptoms of trauma, but where memories were recovered in therapy, sometimes using hypnosis. A backlash against this clinical practice ensued in which the referentiality of the memories was contested under the aegis that it was difficult to know the status of the images mined during therapy, especially as details were sometimes incorrect.¹⁶ Because the majority of recovered memory cases involved daughters accusing fathers, the charges that the memories were false functioned particularly to protect fathers.¹⁷ So trauma theory is closely linked to political struggle, and criticism of recovered memory has been considered part of a general anti-feminist backlash.¹⁸ However, it is worth noting that in most of these cases of child sexual abuse, the traumatic memory remained accessible and conscious, and additionally that in many where there was amnesia, outside corroboration could be found.¹⁹ In this way, more traditional notions of reference – which are less compatible with poststructuralism – still play an important role in the discourse. For instance, in 1997 Walker expressed understandable exasperation that 'documented physical events such as the Holocaust or childhood sexual abuse' were being denied, but she did not mean documented through recovered memory, as she goes on to specify 'in the face of all manner of concrete evidence of their existence'.²⁰ Walker argued against empirical approaches because they had not stopped denial, and because they led to a situation where misremembered details could cause a recovered memory to be dismissed as untrue.²¹ This is a central point about a traumatized, dissociated memory, which Walker terms the 'traumatic paradox', describing its importance and utility thus: 'that external trauma itself can produce the very modifications in remembered detail that cultural conventions invalidate in determinations of truth'.²² One thing to note again here is the survival of empirical testing, as an empirical, narrative account of the past is a precondition for finding distortions in remembered versions.

The other particular characteristic of the amnesiac, dissociated trauma memory which must be recovered, is, in Leone Terr's terms, that 'traumatic memories, in particular, do not deteriorate much at all ... the memory of a terrible episode, once buried and not discussed with anyone else, also tends to stay intact'.²³ Judith Herman likewise writes that 'the traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep'.²⁴ When the memories do erupt or are recovered, this intactness is said to give an unusually strong link, across the time

Syndrome Foundation's attacks on recovered memories of SRA Ian Hacking, 'Memory science, memory politics', in Antze and Lambek (eds), *Tense Past*, p. 69

17 Walker, 'The traumatic paradox', p. 804. Connie M. Kristiansen et al., 'The sociopolitical context of the delayed memory debate', in Linda M. Williams and Victoria L. Banyard (eds), *Trauma and Memory* (London: Sage, 1999), p. 332

18 Haaken, 'The recovery of memory', pp. 1069–70; Walker, 'The traumatic paradox', p. 805; Walker, 'Trauma cinema', p. 212. For an analysis which does not proceed from the assertion that scepticism of recovered memory is intrinsically antifeminist, see Kristiansen et al., 'Sociopolitical context', pp. 331–47.

19 Harvey and Herman, 'Amnesia, partial amnesia', pp. 30–2; Haaken, 'The recovery of memory', p. 1070; Walker, 'The traumatic paradox', p. 804, fn. 6. Haaken points out that amnesiac memories were not a focus in incest cases until the late 1980s. Harvey and Herman point out that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is not always amnesiac, and defend the validity of recovered memory with direct appeals to clinical empiricism and documentation.

20 Walker, 'The traumatic paradox', p. 805. Furthermore, Walker herself uses documentary research to construct her narrative history of the evolution of the films *Kings Row* and *Freud* in 'Textual trauma'.

21 Ibid., pp. 805–7.

22 Ibid., p. 806.

23 Leone Terr, *Unchained Memories: True Stories of Traumatic Memories, Lost and Found* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 40–41.

24 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992), p. 39. See also Antze, 'Telling stories', p. 7; Michael Kenny, 'Trauma, time, illness and culture', in Antze and Lambek, *Tense Past*, p. 153; Radstone, 'Screening trauma', pp. 87–8; Walker, 'Trauma cinema', p. 212; Walker,

that has passed, to the traumatic moment. As Elsaesser writes: 'the traumatic event intimately links several temporalities, making them coexist within the same perceptual or somatic field, so much so that the very distinction between psychic time and chronological time seems suspended'.²⁵ While trauma theorists argue that this form of memory tends to remain intact, and is referential, Caruth suggests that it is 'no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference)'.²⁶ Walker argues that these memories feature 'fantasies, repressions, misperceptions, and interpretations created by the actual events, although not realistically representative of them'.²⁷ This is the reason for Walker's determination to separate fantasy from 'untruth', since in trauma theory fantasy is the important, privileged way in which truth is encoded. The way in which this encoded form presents itself as fragments and repetitions has been likened to modernist and postmodernist aesthetics,²⁸ and this has fed into earlier debates about nonrealist modes of historical representation, such as those contained in *The Persistence of History*, an anthology edited by Vivian Sobchack in 1996.²⁹

The dissociated fragments from which a memory is recovered are characterized by the difficulties they present for conventional reading strategies. The repetitive fragments background or occlude causal links, and patients' emotional attitudes to the fragments are reported to vacillate.³⁰ But trauma memories are not left in this form in therapy, they are read. Caruth writes that 'if trauma is the name of an event that does not leave visible traces, these non-traces are nonetheless recoverable by a different kind of hermeneutics'.³¹ Once decoded though, the recovered memory is a narrative, and joins the other narrative testimonies from non-amnesiac memories of trauma.³² The ethical or political meaning of the recovered memories of child sexual abuse do not seem ambiguous, any more than do the non-amnesiac memories of Holocaust survivors. Whether or not these narratives can do justice to the experience of trauma, they do figure it within a readable form with readable ethics, with clear victim and perpetrator roles. Patients are reported to feel liberated by this process of narrativization, and are able to dismiss their previous, troublingly ambiguous feelings towards the dissociated memory.³³

However, both pro- and anti-recovered memory polemicists admit that recovered memories are true in some cases and false in others, and that there is currently no way, from the memory itself, of distinguishing the true from the (referentially) false.³⁴ Thus, considering the current indispensability of empirical testing to pro-recovered memory polemics, and the recovery process's narrative outcomes, trauma theory's poststructurally respectable offer of an alternative to these things seems distinctly problematic at this stage. However, in its thematizing of the movement from ambiguous fragment to interpretive narrative, *Memento* presents an interesting

'Traumatic paradox', pp. 806–7. Although this assertion, introduced by child psychiatrist Leone Terr in the legal case of *California v. Franklin* in 1989, is very important in Humanities academia's trauma discourse, it remains controversial in clinical circles. For sources who consider it 'not proven' (not 'never to be proven'), see Haaken, 'The recovery of memory', p. 1076; Kathy Pezdek and William Banks, 'Preface' in Pezdek and Banks (eds), *The Recovered Memory/False Memory Debate*, p. xiii; Linda M. Williams and Victoria L. Banyard, 'Introduction', in Williams and Banyard (eds), *Trauma and Memory*, p. xi. The interest in Humanities academia seems related to that in much older ideas concerning belated, intrusive memories, particularly Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*. See Radstone, 'Screening trauma', pp. 85–9; Caruth, 'An interview with Jean Laplanche', paras. 11–68; Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', pp. 197–8.

25 Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', p. 197.

26 Caruth, 'Unclaimed experience', pp. 181–2.

27 Walker, 'The traumatic paradox', p. 809.

28 Radstone, 'Screening trauma', pp. 96–101; Kaplan, 'Melodrama, cinema and trauma', pp. 203–4; Turim, 'Trauma of history', pp. 209–10; Walker, 'Traumatic paradox', pp. 808–23, and 'Trauma cinema', pp. 215–6.

29 Vivian Sobchack (ed.), *The Persistence of History* (London: Routledge, 1996). There are significant links between this volume and the more recent discourse on trauma theory. Elsaesser has refigured his work from this volume. 'Subject positions, speaking positions', around trauma theory in 'Postmodernism as mourning work', p. 195. *The Persistence of History* is referred to by Walker, 'The traumatic paradox', p. 806 and 'Trauma cinema', p. 214. Radstone, 'Trauma and screen studies', pp. 190, 192. Both trauma discourse and *The Persistence of History* refer back

exploration of the stakes and appeal of trauma theory, and what Haaken argues remains 'repressed' in it.

Memento: the past bracketed out by texts

Memento's first scene runs literally backwards, from an instamatic Polaroid photograph of the murdered character Teddy (Joe Pantoliano), through the image's development, its taking, and finally to the shooting of Teddy. This highly stylized scene runs from historical record back to historical action. *Memento* does not have much faith in referentiality, but this scene, and the film's key metaphor, is to trace the impossible backward look of the historian from text to referent.

Memento is a detective/revenge film in which the protagonist Leonard (Guy Pearce) searches for the man he believes raped and murdered his wife, and left him with permanent brain damage. Leonard's ambition is fairly conventional – to kill the man. In addition to the usual problems facing the detective, Leonard's brain injury has left him with 'anterograde memory loss', meaning that he cannot make and keep new memories. If he concentrates, he can remember what he is doing for several minutes at a time, but from the immediate past back to the night of his injury is a mystery to him – time that he cannot even feel. Knowing this constitutes a challenge in his vendetta, he has a system for logging his findings. He takes notes, Polaroids of important people and things, and really important information is tattooed on his body. In this way, his position can be seen as a metaphor for the historian facing a past bracketed out as referent, leaving, in Jameson's words, 'nothing but texts'.³⁵ Further, the film's structure works to make the audience's experience of the unfolding narrative analogous, in important ways, to Leonard's. We get to know him about as well as he knows himself – he literally wears his history, and thereby his identity, on his body, or carries it around in his pocket. Between this highly visible identity, his internal monologues, and his tendency to discuss his problems a great deal (not knowing what he has already told to whom), the film gives considerable access to his interiority. But the backwards plot structure is the most important narrative mechanism for constructing emotional proximity to Leonard and his quest. The film has two plot strands, one in colour, starting with the aforementioned scene of time running backwards, in which all other scenes run forwards but are arranged in reverse order. Each of these scenes covers a period of Leonard's lucidity, and this plot strand runs back to his earlier developing of a photo of the murdered Jimmy Grantz (Larry Holden), who Leonard mistakenly identifies as his wife's killer. The other strand, which punctuates the colour one, is in black and white, runs chronologically forward, and is eventually

further to Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992). From the discourse on trauma see

Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', p. 196. Kaplan, 'Melodrama, cinema', p. 203. In 3. Walker, 'The traumatic paradox', pp. 805–6. Walker, 'Trauma cinema', p. 212. From *The Persistence of History* see White, 'The modernist event', pp. 30–31; Elsaesser, 'Subject positions, speaking positions', pp. 147, 148, 169, 170. Rosenstone, 'The future of the past', p. 216.

30 Haaken, 'The recovery of memory', pp. 1076, 1080–2, 1086.

31 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

32 See written accounts of recovered memories in Antze, 'Telling stories'; Harvey and Herman, 'Amnesia, partial amnesia'.

33 Haaken, 'The recovery of memory', pp. 1083–4, 1086. Pezdek and Banks, 'Introduction', p. xiii.

34 John Kihlstrom, 'Exhumed memory', in Steven Lynn and Kevin McConkey (eds), *Truth in Memory* (New York, NY: The Guildford Press, 1998), p. 18. Williams and Banyard, 'Introduction', p. x. Walker, 'Trauma cinema', p. 212.

35 Jameson, 'Postmodernism', p. 64.

36 Walker, 'The traumatic paradox', p. 806.

revealed to cover the few hours prior to the killing of Jimmy and the killing itself. By suppressing the narrative context of every scene, this structure encourages the viewer to share Leonard's misjudgements, based on reading the texts by which he is surrounded, through the film's many noir-ish reversals. As one example, a scene starts with Leonard and the character Dodd (Callum Keith Rennie) running around some buildings. Leonard asks himself 'Now, what am I doing? Oh, I'm chasing this guy.' We also know no better, until Leonard chases the man and gets shot at for his trouble. 'No,' remarks Leonard, 'he's chasing me.' After escaping, Leonard consults a note and is able to emplot – and thereby understand – these events, as are we.

There are a number of other elements which seem to enact key ideas from trauma theory. Because Leonard cannot make new memories, he cannot feel the time that has passed since his injury. The moment of his trauma is always with him, and he is thus vexed with the 'past that will not pass away'. At one point he says: 'How am I supposed to heal if I can't feel time?' In this way, the memory he consciously has of his trauma – that is, the death of his wife after they were attacked – is outside of time, atemporal like a trauma memory. This is Leonard's conscious memory of trauma, but he has a narratively suppressed 'amnesia' memory, which is 'absent in its traces', the discovery of which at the film's conclusion constitutes its major plot reversal. Leonard's conscious memory has been very dynamic in protecting the amnesia hole, and, while the fantasies it has developed over time have been dynamic, the structure of absence seems to have been consistent and 'not degraded at all'. In this way he does carry a referential, atemporal memory of his trauma in his fantasies, but it is neither 'straightforwardly referential' nor consciously available to him. Leonard's need for textual fragments to gain some access to the past allows the film to externalize the making, revision and distortion of memory. The photos he carries of people feature captions, such as 'Teddy: do not believe his lies' and 'Natalie: She has lost someone too, she will help you out of pity'. But the photo of Natalie has an earlier caption crossed out, concretizing his revision of memory. He also has the police report on his wife's death, missing twelve pages, with other parts crossed out, and many notes added. The original report, like an original memory, is not available, and this and the process of transformation are concretized through the altered report.

Walker has described the 'traumatic paradox' as being that 'external trauma itself can produce the very modifications in remembered detail that cultural conventions invalidate in determinations of truth',³⁶ and has suggested further that:

a traumatic experience can produce this sort of trail of symptoms leading to the legitimization of memory, traumatic experiences . . .

[it] can also produce fantasies, repressions, misperceptions, and interpretations *created* by the actual events, although not realistically representative of them.³⁷

Leonard's most important trauma is that he accidentally killed his wife, who had survived the attack in which they were both injured. A diabetic in despair over Leonard's irreparable injury, she had him unknowingly administer to her a massive insulin overdose by pretending she had not yet had her shot. This is what is stored in his amnesia memory. He had access to this information through the unexpurgated version of the police report, and was able to learn about it through repetition, to which his condition responds. However, at some point he censored the report, his available memories were altered through the misremembered fantasy scene of his wife dying in the attack, and his wife's actual death was attributed to the fictional wife of another person he had known. He has also had a mirror-image tattoo, running from shoulder to shoulder across his chest, reading 'John G. [the attacker] raped and murdered my wife'. Every time he stands bare-chested in front of a mirror, he sees this sentence. The recollection of his real trauma is quite absent from Leonard's available memory fragments, but present in the way it has distorted and dictated the shape of what is present. Leonard learns of his real past again from Teddy, at the plot's end but the story's beginning, directly after killing Jimmy Grantz. Although Teddy helped Leonard find the original attacker, whom he killed a year back, Leonard did not remember and so Teddy fell to using the continued vendetta as way of leading Leonard, Cesare-like, around the country, killing men who more or less fit the clues – John (later, 'or James') G., white, drug dealer. Teddy has been ripping off the drug dealers to boot. Once informed by Teddy's testimony and confession, Leonard deliberately does not remember any of it – he takes no note of it, and destroys the picture of the dead Jimmy. Instead, he exploits the fact that Teddy's full name is John Edward Gamil – John G. – that he is now involved in the drug trade, and is white. So, Leonard has Teddy's car registration number tattooed on his arm as an important 'fact' about the original attacker. The memory is still dissociated, but he knows that this means he will almost certainly kill Teddy. Teddy's next to last words in the plot's beginning are 'Wait! You don't know what's going on', which is correct. But Leonard's traumatized self knows all too well. When Teddy then challenges Leonard to visit the basement, where Jimmy Grantz's corpse still lies, Leonard immediately shoots him.

This essay's title, concerning 'victimage and violence', refers to the particular political causes that have informed the need to revise or restore reference. These revolve around victimage³⁸ – the Holocaust, colonialism, and child sexual abuse – and the violence which created it. Radstone has argued that there is a 'hidden violence

³⁸ Also noted by Paul Antze and Michal Lambek. Preface' in Antze and Lambek (eds), *Tense Past*, pp. vii, xxiv, xxviii. Antze, 'Telling stories' p. 10. Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', pp. 194–5. Radstone, 'Screening trauma', pp. 89–94, and 'Social bonds and psychological order', pp. 61, 66.

39 Radstone: 'Social bonds and psychical order', p. 66 (emphasis in original)

that subtends identification solely with victimhood, since it is only from a position of absolute power that the predatory capacity of others can cease to be a point of identification'³⁹. *Memento* is structured around just this conundrum. The generically indestructible Leonard is acting to honour the memory of his and his wife's victimization. The revenge narrative, coupled with the detective one, posits violence as a limit case of the need for knowledge – the need to be quite certain that the right target has been selected in order to legitimate the extreme action designed, in the genre, to 'mete out justice'. So here *Memento* contains a metaphorical figuring of the stakes of the political commitment in film studies which calls for trauma theory. If history is not accessible and the perpetrator not identified, selecting the wrong target may lead to further violence. But *Memento* also lays emphasis on reading. The film's tricky plot, the pervasive ambiguity of event and also character – Teddy is a relatively sympathetic character in some ways – keep the audience engaged in the urgent struggle for meaning, a meaning based on reference to the past. When that meaning is provided, it is partly by something that is impossible in the real world – time flowing backwards – and also by the final ability to construct narrative. This ability finally comes from the story told by Teddy, and this is the audience's only way of identifying what Leonard's trauma is and the form of its dissociation. But Teddy's confession functions also to shatter the already damaged Manichean framework that the audience initially shared with Leonard, and reveals the implicit violence hidden in the will to identify, and identify with, pure victimhood. Seen this way, the film seems designed to implicate the audience emotionally in an exploration of the process of constructing a cause-and-effect chain from fragmentary clues, in order to bestow meaning and dispel the painful ambiguity of an unavailable past, lost somewhere behind a wall of texts. *Memento*'s manipulative use of a highly suppressive narrative and the extreme emotional proximity it constructs with Leonard has constantly tempted the viewer to jump to retrospectively regrettable conclusions. In this way, what is stressed is the place of the reader's own desire in the unavoidable gamble of interpretation.

Authorship, history and the dialectic of trauma: Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*

DANIEL HUMPHREY

As Derek Jarman was working on *The Last of England* (1987), the queer filmmaker's savage critique of Margaret Thatcher's Britain, he kept a journal published under the same title as the film and sold as a companion book. In a key passage, Jarman described the morning of 22 December 1986, the day he received the results of a test confirming he was HIV positive:

The young doctor who told me this morning I was a carrier of AIDS virus was visibly distressed. I smiled and told her not to worry; I had never liked Christmas. I had put on my dark black overcoat . . . to walk to the hospital. Wearing it at my father's funeral a few weeks ago I looked more sombre than the undertakers. It gave me confidence for this meeting. As I walked up the freezing street against the tide of Christmas shoppers, I thought it was inconceivable I could have avoided the virus, though I had avoided the test as long as was decently possible. . . . It was almost with relief that I listened to the doctor's catalogue of do's and don'ts . . . but for all of medicine you might as well wash your mouth out with carbolic. The sword of Damocles had taken a sideways swipe, but I was still sitting in the chair.¹

¹ Derek Jarman, *The Last of England*, ed. David L. Hirst (London: Constable, 1987), pp. 16–17.

I quote this passage at length because in it Jarman reveals several remarkable thoughts and feelings with important ramifications for the consideration of the interrelated issues of authorship and trauma, not to mention referentiality and experience. First, Jarman indicated that

he *smiled* and, indeed, actually found himself in the position of comforting his doctor. Second, Jarman's statement that he 'never liked Christmas' stands almost as an ironic rejection of his own culture's most-central holiday, a holiday celebrating a mythic birth followed by a martyrdom and a triumphant resurrection. Thus, in a double denial, the journal indicates that Jarman refused the impact of the bad news (by smiling at his test results) while also refusing the cultural ideology that might most easily have comforted him. Finally, he alluded to the recent passing of his father by mentioning his overcoat. Both at the hospital and on his journey home, Jarman felt comforted by this coat as he contemplated his mortality. And yet, the reader might wonder, did Jarman have the 'confidence' he claimed the coat gave him because he had Oedipally outlived his father? Or, since he had successfully coped with his parent's death, did Jarman therefore feel confident he would be able to cope with his own? Or was Jarman indicating that the coat which had given him comfort at his own father's funeral was now giving comfort in a meeting that he felt to be his *own* funeral?

Jarman's answer could not have been clearer: 'the sword of Damocles had taken a sideways swipe'. He felt he had already been killed, not at that unidentifiable, but now undeniable, moment when he had been infected with HIV, but rather at the moment when his HIV status was confirmed by the doctor. One can see this doctor's visit to be a discursively produced death that Jarman had physically survived, only to find himself reenacting again and again through the film *The Last of England*.

In a previous *Screen* dossier on trauma theory in film studies, edited by Susannah Radstone, Janet Walker offers a useful description of the features characteristic of what she names 'trauma cinema':

These films are characterized by non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound, repetition, rapid editing and strange angles. And they approach the past through an unusual admixture of emotional affect, metonymic symbolism and cinematic flashbacks.²

This is a near perfect description of the aesthetic Jarman used for *The Last of England*. The film enacts a 'dialectic of trauma' in which the issues of referentiality, historical memory, and authorship (even subjectivity) become spectacularly foregrounded and problematized.

The Last of England, upon casual viewing, can seem little more than a randomly connected series of documentary film fragments, both revealing and exemplifying an apocalyptic world in which the apocalypse not only threatens the film's diegetic universe, but also any traditional sense of authorship that might be responsible for it. Paraphrasing Roland Barthes, the birth of a spectator able to construct meaning out of such a film, out of what appears to be a

2 Janet Walker, 'Trauma cinema: false memories and true experience', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), p. 214.

- 3 Roland Barthes, 'The death of the author', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 49–55.

cacophonous collage of incoherent footage, must necessarily involve the death of any kind of ordering intelligence.³ On the other hand, the spectre of authorial enunciation is everywhere apparent in *The Last of England*. As difficult as it may be to follow, something of a story threads throughout *The Last of England*, as a film within a film, one involving a clear sense of authorial enunciation.

Immediately following the opening credits, the film begins with actual images of Jarman himself, furiously writing captions to a series of photographs affixed in a large scrapbook, images which will spectacularly recur as motion pictures (in other words, the shots in the film) as the film unfolds upon the screen. Finally, as if flooding from the mind of this 'Jarman' – as memories, dreams, and fantasies – the narrative, such as it is, begins.

The story concerns a queer adolescent (played by the non-professional actor, Spring) who is first seen masturbating on top of a reproduction of Caravaggio's 'Profane Love', then seen shooting heroin, then wandering through a desolate, guerilla-filled urban landscape. Subsequently, his path crosses that of a slightly older man who also seems destitute. This man (Spencer Leigh) is, for his part, preoccupied by a woman (Tilda Swinton) whose image appears in a number of brief flashbacks. Eventually the seemingly supernatural adolescent vanishes from the film, and soon the older man is executed. Finally, the woman from the latter man's dreams appears in the diegetic present and is forced to marry a priggish gentleman. At the film's conclusion, this woman tears and cuts off her wedding dress, leaving England and her new husband via a small boat as part of an image that faintly recalls the Ford Madox Brown painting from which the film takes its title.

As the connection between Jarman and the adolescent is a strong one (the spectator sees Jarman's distinct shadow as he photographs Spring with his super-8 camera, and Spring is clearly sexualized from Jarman's characteristic boy-worshipping perspective), the youth's disappearance from the film just as Jarman's own image and narration also vanishes leaves a palpable sense of loss. But the emergence of the older man at the juncture of the pixie's departure does occasion the solidification of something of a narrative, and it signals a narrative relay structure which will continue with his execution and the emergence of his former female lover. Thus, as the film progresses, one sense of the author (Jarman the actor playing 'Jarman' the onscreen author) vanishes as another sense of the author (Jarman the constructor of narration and meaning) gradually appears to the spectator. In the final moments of the film, an arresting dissolve/superimposition shows us the pages that the diegetic author had been writing on screen almost ninety minutes before, thus reminding us of the originary, onscreen author whose existence has been held in abeyance for the larger part of the film.

Both Annette Kuhn's assertion that *The Last of England* is 'a less

- 4 Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 109
- 5 Robert Hewison, *Future Tense: a New Art for the Nineties* (London: Methuen, 1990), p. 78

personal film ... than it may seem⁴ and Robert Hewison's claim that it is 'entirely autobiographical', a 'most personal of visions',⁵ are thus justified. The film dizzyingly struggles between an assertion of authorial presence on the one hand and the suicidal effacement of individual agency on the other. And in this way, Jarman's struggle between an author's life and death demonstrates a paradigmatic instance of traumatic response. According to contemporary trauma theory, a trauma-inducing moment involves the personal survival of some horrendous event – an event so sudden and so seemingly inescapable that the subject's own sense of survival is felt to be untenable. In her important *Screen* essay, Walker offers a quotation from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* adumbrating the various traumatic events that lead to the form of trauma recently defined as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including:

military combat, violent personal assault (sexual assault, physical attack, robbery, mugging), being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, incarceration as prisoner of war or in a concentration camp, natural or manmade disasters, severe automobile accidents, or being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness.⁶

- 6 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), p. 424

Although the events on this list seem locatable as specific concrete events, recent exegeses of Freud's writings have pointed out that the classically traumatic event is almost inevitably something that one is unable to experience fully at the time it occurs.

To explain, Cathy Caruth offers this insight following a close reading of Freud's account of a traumatizing train collision:

What is truly striking about the accident victim's experience of the event ... is the fact that the victim ... was never fully conscious during the accident itself. ... The experience of trauma ... would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can ... never fully be known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself.⁷

- 7 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 17

For Freud, in 'Moses and monotheism', latency is the term marking the correspondence between historical periods of unknowing and the psychic state of unknowing named with the terminology of infectious disease: the 'incubation period'.⁸ Historical latency exists in this model until a 'traumatic neurosis' ultimately manifests itself within the subject. At that moment, the horror of the unassimilated, survived, traumatic event, the event one has experienced but does not know, returns. This trauma exists through a seemingly endless repetition of the horrors from which a constructed subject or culture should logically want to escape. Caruth points out that in a traumatic narrative there is 'a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life; between the story of

- 8 Sigmund Freud, 'Moses and monotheism', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, volume XXIII, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), pp. 67–8

- 9 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 7 (emphasis in original)

- 10 Cathy Caruth and Thomas Keenan, "The AIDS crisis is not over": a conversation with Gregg Bordowitz, Douglas Crimp, and Laura Pinsky, in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 256. The remarks, by Richard Goldstein, that Crimp refers to are from "A plague on all our houses", *Village Voice*, 16 September 1987.

- 11 Jarman, *At Your Own Risk* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), p. 83.

- 12 Thomas Elsaesser, "Postmodernism as mourning work", *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), p. 194.

- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 200.

the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival'.⁹ Compounding this sense of oscillation is the fact that a 'crisis of death' that is also a 'crisis of life' is rarely recognized, let alone validated, by those living around the traumatized subject.

Traumatic ignorance of this kind has been conceptualized by Douglas Crimp in terms of AIDS and HIV infection:

What in this context would be something like trauma producing, I think, is that certain people are experiencing the AIDS crisis while the society as a whole doesn't appear to be experiencing it at all. Richard Goldstein said that it's as if we were living through the Blitz, except that nobody else knows it's happening.¹⁰

This echoes Jarman, who elucidated a similar kind of understanding when he wrote that the 1980s

was a time when all that was rotten bubbled to the surface. If you were not at the receiving end of this mayhem, you could be unaware of it. It was possible to live through the decade preoccupied by the mortgage and the pence you saved on your income tax.¹¹

Thomas Elsaesser, in the *Screen* trauma dossier, seems to be referring to this kind of theorization of trauma when he calls it 'a theory of victimhood and a politics of blame, in which various ethnic, gender or sexual preference groups vie (sometimes with each other) for a place in the sun of righteous indignation (or lucrative litigation)'.¹² But if Elsaesser later in his article considers one of the justifiable uses of trauma theory as being its ability to elucidate 'a referentiality that can no longer be placed . . . in a particular time or place, but whose time-space-place-referentiality is nonetheless posited, in fact, doubled and displaced in relation to an "event"',¹³ *The Last of England's* inscription of AIDS trauma stands as an exemplary text of traumatic referentiality for modernist victims of social injustice. Set as it is within an apocalyptic postcolonial Britain where the future, past, and present are violently mixed together, something very reminiscent of the Blitz does seem to be occurring in *The Last of England*. But as Goldstein and Crimp say of AIDS, this 'Blitz' is not occurring for everybody: it occurs only for the poor, the homeless, the drug addicts, the young queers and the racial minorities of Britain. In a particularly damning moment, the film's queer pixie stares directly into the camera while playing a pan-flute. This shot is intercut with images of businessmen and women crossing a commuter bridge, completely oblivious to the abject conditions from which the young man plaintively calls out. The England that this unconcerned bourgeois class inhabits seems completely untouched by any sense of physical risk or social violence.

14 Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), p. 62

15 Ibid., p. 60

16 Ibid.

17 For example, 'Is the rectum a grave?', in Douglas Crimp (ed.), *AIDS Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 197–222, and *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)

18 Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, p. 62

19 Kirby Farrell, *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 12

Some of film's detractors, even within the queer theory world, find *The Last of England* not merely semi-incoherent, but disturbingly so. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit call it 'a truly frightening film' for being so violently invaded by overpowering 'fantasmatic' material.¹⁴ They point to its running motif of unsuccessful ingestion, what they call its 'furiously frustrated orality',¹⁵ including, among other images, those of a naked madman eating and vomiting up a rotten cauliflower, the aforementioned bride unsuccessfully attempting to eat cloth flowers cut from her wedding dress, and a man in a neck brace, chewing on oatmeal spooned from a bowler hat which is ultimately placed atop his head.

Bersani and Dutoit see in these images a return to 'the horrendous impotence of an abandoned infancy, and to the murderous fury of that impotence',¹⁶ but this reading ignores the spectre of HIV infection as, precisely, an ingestion: an ingestion which one would surely want to expel from one's body afterwards, if one only could. Bersani's blind spot is perhaps understandable if we take into account the fact that this queer theorist has been more consistently concerned with anal intercourse than with oral sex.¹⁷ It is surprising, however, that Bersani and Dutoit ignore the passage with which I start this essay, in which Jarman makes yet another reference to oral activity relating to HIV: 'For all of medicine, you might as well just wash your mouth out with carbolic'. Thus, far from categorizing the film as a mere 'state-of-the-nation filmic project',¹⁸ invaded by Jarman's violent phantasmatic energy, one must consider how this particular state-of-the-nation project, and the historical consciousness that drives it, functions as a traumatic response to HIV and AIDS.

The film's ever-present onscreen bonfires – manipulated by computer to exude an unnatural shade of orange – connote a transmissible radioactivity rather than a sense of a sustaining warmth. The over-saturated hues on the characters' faces subtly suggest the orange skin of the hepatitis sufferer. The ravaged inner cities, captured by the film's cinematographers in the primitive Super-8 format, likewise suggest the ill body of the advanced AIDS sufferer. Through Jarman's feverish, vertiginous aesthetic, the spectator is almost nauseated by the hyper-kinetic camera movements, shell-shocked by flash frames, thrown into a kind of dementia by the film's nearly unreadable diegesis. But the images of destruction – a shattered narrative speaking of a shattered society – go beyond suggesting a shattered immune system. Indeed, the converse reading is equally true. This film suggests that a confrontation with physical sickness can make palpable a discursive sickness, and that the trauma of AIDS exposes the trauma of history. Cultural anthropologist Kirby Farrell writes: 'cultural integrity and death anxiety are closely and reciprocally related'.¹⁹ And as Chris Lippard and Guy Johnson put it in terms of the film, '*The Last of England* ... suffers under a political sickness, inscribed on the body of England, on its

20 Chris Lippard and Guy Johnson, 'Private practice, public health: the politics of sickness and the films of Derek Jarman', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 286

21 Jarman, *The Last of England*, p. 190.

22 Like 'The Last of England', 'GBH' was used as a title for a series of artworks that Jarman completed and displayed in this period

23 Derek Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Caravaggio* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 44.

24 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 91

25 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, p. 424

architecture and landscape, and more directly, onto the bodies of those excluded (from health, from homes, from jobs).²⁰

Thus, whatever the manifest social ills seen onscreen (hunger, pollution, a repressive state apparatus in the form of brutal riot police), the cruel fact of death is everywhere apparent just beneath the film's savage political critique. Jarman's journal points to this when it names the earlier titles the director considered for the film: 'I originally called the film "Victorian Values". . . . Then came "The Dead Sea" suggesting Böcklin crossing the waters to the Isle of the Dead; we decided this was too poetic. "GBH" (Grievous Bodily Harm) seemed a better idea.'²¹ Suggesting Böcklin's journey, the title 'The Dead Sea' highlights a death instinct at work within the film's dialectic of trauma. Under the title 'GBH', *The Last of England* would have made a more explicit connection between the destruction of the land and culture of England and the destruction of the human body through AIDS (the GB of the title can stand for both Grievous Bodily and Great Britain).²²

As it stands under its ultimate title, numerous documentary images of Britain's past – shot by Jarman's father and maternal grandfather – are interspersed throughout the film. Through violent editing strategies, this footage collides with Jarman's own, constructing a discontinuous reaction to what Jarman once called 'the present past'.²³ Together these images construct a latent history struggling to be exposed through the dialectic that Jarman's film enacts. If Jarman's acknowledged political agenda was to attack the failure of 1980s Tory social policy and blame it for the social catastrophes *The Last of England's* cameras contemplate, the kind of historical consciousness his traumatic aesthetic expresses – infected by his personal trauma – reveals something more. It exposes the latency from which historical interpretation and meaning must emerge in order to confront the ideologies responsible for social injustice.

Trauma is, as Caruth says, 'the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur'.²⁴ Crucially, of all the traumas listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 'being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness'²⁵ is unique in its particularly slippery referential nature. One is not suffering from a violent or dangerous event (such as a rape or a car accident) at the moment of a medical diagnosis; rather, one is being made aware of a previous life-threatening event that has so far gone unnoticed. After all, few HIV-positive individuals in the 1980s could have known the exact moment of their infection. The 'unknowing' that exists among all those who have lived, obliviously, through this 'Blitz-like' catastrophe, then functions as a reflection and vexing reminder of an HIV sufferer's own sense of unknowing, all our senses of unknowing. This unknowing – not unlike the emotionally true but factually distorted memories which Walker discusses in relation to

the trauma of childhood sexual abuse – makes impossible, yet necessitates, the creation of some kind of wounded, efficacious and recognizably fictitious construct, one which can only be labeled 'historical consciousness'. Such a realization obliges us to understand how historiography is invoked as an investment in an always-impossible transcendence of the material concerns of the historian in the present.

Each epoch contains its own particular and unique traumas, and every trauma is finally reflected in the subsequent construction of history. If Jarman's onscreen history of twentieth-century England is particularly traumatic, it nonetheless ultimately points to the traumas behind other histories, and as the latent becomes a seemingly tardy historical consciousness, the pain of the present past can only become the images and texts of our culture. For the category of authorship, Jarman's discursive self-(de)construction suggests something equally imperative. As the state of both trauma and authorship are borne upon a void, one is faced with the traumatic force behind all assertions of history and subjectivity. If, as Caruth puts it, 'history' is 'the history of trauma',²⁶ the history of subjectivity must also confront its traumatic origins. Jarman's very real, very painful life and death may have made visible that which previously could only have been discussed in the most dispassionate, theoretical terms. Jarman's pained strategies of authorship and cinematic production revealed themselves in the negotiation between the drive towards death and the striving towards the vital, life-affirming performativity of one's desire, ethics, hopes: in other words, in the self-construction of the author as the creator of his own history.

Thanks to Professors Douglas Crimp, Andrés Nader and Jackie Stacey, as well as to Lucy Curzon, Su-ching Huang, Matthew Reynolds, Akiko Mizoguchi, and Joe Wlodarz, for their valuable comments. Thanks also to Janet Staiger for offering a written copy of her forthcoming essay on authorship, 'Rethinking authorship studies in a poststructural era: the case of Gus Van Sant'. Funding assistance for my work was provided by The University of Rochester's Program in Visual and Cultural Studies and the Susan B. Anthony Institute for Gender and Women's Studies.

²⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 15.

Masking the horror of trauma: the hysterical body of Lon Chaney

KAREN RANDELL

This paper addresses Thomas Elsaesser's contention that 'trauma theory is not so much a theory of recovered memory as it is one of recovered referentiality'.¹ This notion of recovered referentiality has led me to consider the way in which the effects and consequences of World War I – the mass mutilation of men's bodies and the return of those men to society – have been represented in film.² In this essay I consider in particular how the return of the damaged male body can be seen as displaced within a narrative of displayed deformity through the characterizations of a silent screen actor, Lon Chaney. I shall argue that Chaney's 'transformative masculinity' throughout the 1920s allows for a neurotic repetition of the disfigured or deformed male body to be visualized on screen.³ Although the war does not figure explicitly in Chaney's films, I shall argue that the neurotic repetition of deformity provides a contextual reference to the war maimed. My focus text here is one of Chaney's later silent films, *The Unknown* (Tod Browning, 1927). What interests me is the way in which this film can be viewed as part of the anxiety in prevailing public discourse surrounding the war and the maimed both in the UK and the USA.⁴

Put simply, war trauma is what remains after the terrors of war have been lived through and rationalized. Thomas Elsaesser has suggested that these 'traumatic events for contemporary culture turn around the question of how to represent the unrepresentable, or how – in Samuel Beckett's words – to name the unnameable'.⁵ Elsaesser's question of how to represent trauma is a pertinent one for film studies. If the trauma, the shock, that is caused by war cannot be

- 1 Thomas Elsaesser
Postmodernism as mourning
work *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2
(2001) p. 201
- 2 My research interest is
Hollywood film and the portrayal
of physical and psychological
injury after World War I and
Vietnam
- 3 I borrow this term from Gaylyn
Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade*
(New York, NY: Columbia
University Press, 1996), p. 201
- 4 One only need look at issues of
The Times, *New York Times*,
Chicago Herald, *British Medical*
Journal and *Washington Post*
from this period to realize the
extent of the interest in returning
veterans and disability
- 5 Elsaesser 'Postmodernism as
mourning work' p. 195

named, is not conscious, cannot be made visible, then its cinematic representation would seem to be impossible. To pursue this problematic in relation to this particular historical project, I shall ask what the 'unnamable' is here in Chaney's film 'Trauma narratives' in film are the symptoms of a traumatic event that does not happen within the narrative of the film itself but is implicit in the text as an indeterminate back-story *The Unknown* mediates anxieties that pertain to World War I even though the war itself is absent from the text. For such trauma narratives in film, Elsaesser suggests, that 'one would have to invent a 'negative performativity' to explain this absence. So, what might a 'negative performativity' mean here? If the absence of signs of trauma are what alerts the audience to its very presence, then there must be a performed display of this absence present in the narrative. If there is a performance in which the absence is made apparent, I would suggest that trauma is displaced within the narrative structure of the film to make such a gap possible.

One familiar example might be the excessive performative quality of German expressionism in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), which enables a reading to be made of the somnambulist whose performance goes beyond the narrative coherence of the text. Anton Kaes has suggested that the 'catatonic' stare of the hypnotized young man 'echoes the faces of the shell-shocked'.⁶ The traumatic event, World War I, is not present within the text but the hysterical symptoms are. Here they are displaced within the sideshow display of the fair, and the young man's pathological behaviour is explained through the evil demands of Dr Caligari. However, for Kaes, the propinquity of the film's production and release to the end of World War I, and the presence in Germany of so many shell-shocked veterans, provides a contextual reference of the traumatic event of the war.

Similarly in the case of Lon Chaney, his performance of deformity suggests a negativity in that the traumatic event of World War I — part of the fabric of the film's original production and reception context — is not present in the text. Rather we are alerted to the traumatic symptoms of the aftermath of the war through an 'over-performance', an excess, within Chaney's characterizations. His unique use of makeup, prosthetic devices, costume and performance, coupled with the (well-publicized) physical pain and damage that he endured to create these characters, presents a paradoxical situation in which the absence is marked by its over-presence: the negative performance of trauma is marked by excess. As with Conrad Veidt's expressionistic performance in *Caligari*, which alerts the audience to an internal dialogue expressed externally, so Chaney's performance alerts us to the absence through its over-presence of deformity and dementia within the narrative of these films.

Chaney's publicized obsession not only with playing grotesque and

6 Anton Kaes, 'Weimar cinema and the trauma of The Great War', unpublished paper given at Goethe Institute/British Film Institute Conference, London, November 1997.

- 7 See *Picture Play Magazine* and *Movie Magazine* from 1924–29, in which articles on Chaney's makeup, endurance of pain and his life story appear frequently. Also see Michael F. Blake, *The Man Behind the Thousand Faces* (Lanham MD: Vestal, 1990).

- 8 Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade*, p. 199.

mutilated characters, but also in causing great pain and discomfort to himself in the process, took up much of the trade press and fan magazine space around him and helped to create his mysterious and elusive star persona. Audiences went to see 'who' he was going to be in this movie and 'how' he was going to achieve this.⁷ The display of deformity and disfigurement became a 'must see' spectacle in the same way that the nineteenth-century 'freak show' displayed its characters to a paying audience. Deformity here becomes a site of entertainment rather than a site of anxiety. In this way, the films of Lon Chaney act as an interpolation (an insert that both alerts one to, and distracts one from, the traumatic event) between the spectator and the trauma. The films are doubly coded as trauma narratives, first, by the way in which the war as an event is absent, and second, by the way the deformed and disfigured male body is referring to the maimed veterans who are not actually represented.

The overt reference here is to the freak show and the already existing discourse, as Studlar has suggested, around the damaged body as 'other', that moves it into a fantasy narrative to both fascinate and repulse the viewer.⁸ In *The Unknown* the damaged body, and the anxiety that this somatic image causes to the civilian population, is displaced into the safe space of an other (fantasy) space, namely the cinematic space, that which cannot be referred to in an entertainment context directly (the anxieties implemented by the war maimed) can be expressed through fantasy. The spectacle of the damaged body is played out in *The Unknown* through a relationship between Chaney's onscreen and offscreen personae. There is a duality here that allows for deformity to be displayed as a marketing tool for the pre-publicity surrounding the release of the film and as a fantasy spectacle within the film itself.

In *The Unknown* Chaney plays Alonzo the 'armless' knife thrower (he throws with his feet) from a travelling circus. Nanon (played by Joan Crawford) is Alonzo's beautiful assistant who will not allow herself to be touched by any man (although little explanation is given for this). She is repulsed by the strongman, Malibar, and is able to find comfort in her platonic relationship with Alonzo because (as she, the rest of the circus and, at this point, the cinema audience believe) he does not possess the hands to touch her. It is some time into the film before the audience is allowed to share Alonzo's secret that he does, in fact, have arms and hands and that they are strapped to his chest. The moment of this revelation is one of deliberation, anticipation and spectacle. Alonzo is placed with his back to the audience and centred within the frame, the criss-cross cords of his corset displayed as Alonzo's confidante, Cojo the circus midget, slowly unties and, as Alonzo turns, unwraps him until his arms are revealed. Like a (silent) freak show talker, Cojo announces the

moment of revelation through gesture, and the framing enables this act to be shown 'centre-stage' This is what the audience has paid their money for and this is the deformed body, the disabled body, the damaged male body made whole again: a fantastic illusion, a fantasy

During the making of *The Unknown*, Joan Crawford remarked upon the way in which Chaney, 'mesmerized himself into his part', he was, she said, 'the most tense, exciting individual that I have ever met'.⁹ What is remarkable about Chaney's acting style is the way in which he took pain to be a required part of his act. Talking of his (quasi) method acting style, Crawford remarked:

Mr Chaney could have un-strapped his arms between scenes. He did not. He kept them strapped one day for five hours, enduring such numbness, such torture, that when we got to this scene, he was able to convey not just realism but such emotional agony that it was shocking . . . and fascinating.¹⁰

But this 'agony' is doubly coded here: shocking and fascinating as it is, Chaney's performance of pain and 'torture' enables Alonzo to fake it. Chaney's pain is Alonzo's pain. The actual pain that Chaney endures is incorporated into the character of Alonzo so that the two are inextricably linked in this screen moment. Like the freak show 'gaffs', the tricksters who masqueraded as deformed characters, Chaney and Alonzo can dupe their audiences.

This masquerade is further exposed several scenes later when Alonzo has again been freed from his harness; he discusses his love for Nanon with Cojo, imploring, 'I have to have her Cojo'. His friend points out that if he were to marry her, Nanon would realize that he does indeed have arms. As they talk Alonzo puts a cigarette into his mouth and lights it with his feet.¹¹ Cojo points and laughing says 'you have forgotten that you have arms'. This realization that he can function without arms and hands is a catalytic moment in the film, and Alonzo's direct address to the camera preludes a shocking realization for the audience. The cut to the next scene takes us to a brilliant white room, the sudden appearance of which creates a rupture within the text which alerts us and jolts us into the medical world. Alonzo and Cojo are in an operating theatre, Alonzo is to have his arms amputated so that he is indeed unable to touch Nanon on their wedding night.

Alonzo's act of self-mutilation (in choosing to have this procedure) ensures that he is, to use Joanna Bourke's phrase, 'mutilator and mutilated in one'. Bourke suggests that, 'in war . . . the injured man was not disabled but mutilated. He was the fit man, the potent man rendered impotent'.¹² Alonzo believes that this act of symbolic castration will ensure he has Nanon's love; in this perverse act he takes power over his own body to effect action. This reverses the power which, during and after World War I, was denied to soldiers

9 Roy Newquist *Conversations with Joan Crawford* (Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 1980) p. 30

10 Joan Crawford *A Portrait of Joan: the Autobiography of Joan Crawford* (New York: NY Doubleday, 1962), p. 69

11 This is not Chaney as contortionist but rather a real circus performer hired for the film to be Chaney's foot double

12 Joanna Bourke *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and The Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996) p. 50

whose limbs were involuntarily removed because of damage caused by an uncontrollable force. Alonzo is the potent whole male, here, but renders himself voluntarily 'impotent' to achieve Nanon's love. What is at stake is the way in which this trauma of amputation has been displaced within a generic convention – the monster.

Chaney's monsters, however, always demand pathos, requiring the audience to sympathize with the character, not just to shrink back in horror. It is not only the disruptive structure of the film and the performance of Chaney but also his publicized background of disability that bring about this insistence. Surrounded by difference from birth, Chaney himself made a case for drawing a connection between his early life and the sympathetic approach to the characters that he played. The opening paragraph of 'My own life story', (supposedly) narrated by Chaney in 1925, tells of the significant early influence of disability:

My father and mother were both deaf-mutes – a great many people are inclined to pity deaf mutes, but I have found them among some of the happiest, most contented people in the world¹³. They are very social. Because the outside world of amusement does not distract them, they seek and find happiness in their own homes – and frequently give parties there.¹⁴

What is significant is the way in which this disability does not render his parents as victims; rather Chaney makes much of the positive lifestyle that is enabled by their difference. Later biographical material, however, insists on the connection between his early life and the characters that he played. For instance, Universal's publicity material for the release of the biopic *Man of a Thousand Faces* in 1957 states,

He refused to utter a word in public until he was eight out of sympathy with his parents – the young Lon tried to transfer their sorrow onto his shoulders and he carried a brooding sympathy for the afflicted with him for the rest of his life.¹⁵

It goes on to suggest, 'this, perhaps, is the real reason why he so often played disfigured men. He tried to make the world sympathize with their plight, and he succeeded.' This paradoxical coupling of Chaney's own positive perception of difference and the way in which his performances have been interpreted is made all the more complex when one takes into account the lengths to which he went to portray disabled and deformed characters onscreen. His discomfort and actual bodily damage create a star/character fusion that enables him to 'become' disabled.¹⁶

To conclude, I want to return to Elsaesser's questioning of the problem of representing trauma narrative, in which he suggests that 'accepting the latency hypothesis as significant for filmmaking almost necessitates a theory of trauma, in order to understand the nature of

13 Chaney was born one of four children – all hearing.

14 Lon Chaney 'My own life story', *Movie Magazine* September 1925 p. 97.

15 Universal International Pictures press pack, *Man of a Thousand Faces* (Joseph Pevney 1957) British Film Institute Archive.

16 For example whilst filming *The Penalty* (Wallace Worsley II 1920) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Wallace Worsley II 1923) Chaney seriously damaged his back and ever afterwards walked with a limp. Whilst filming *The Phantom of the Opera* (Rupert Julian 1925) he damaged his nostrils.

the delays (the displacements of an event and its representation) and to be able to pose the question. why this or that film now?¹⁷

So, why this Lon Chaney film now? This film is not concerned with the trauma of the war but rather with the trauma of the effects of war that cannot be represented, the war is absent but the effects are not. The public witness is the reality of injury, both psychological and physical, that exists as a result of World War I. In this context, Chaney becomes a point of reference for the continuing presence of the veterans of the war and that which 'cannot be named' – the horrific physical and psychological damage. It is this which is displaced onto a cinematic embodiment of the traumatic effects of World War I.

For the US audience at the time this becomes a double displacement, for Chaney's films also relocate them firmly within a European landscape. The war in Europe and its 'horror' is transported via the European locations which introduce the notion of the European as 'other' (as a place of dislocation and trauma), and relocate disability, deformity and disfigurement back to its original geographical source. There is a return to the site of trauma: the damaged male body placed back in Europe where it came from. By displacing this damaged male body into a fantasy narrative, the anxieties around this visible presence within postwar society can be safely negotiated. This interpolation is created through the spectacle of the monster: deformity becomes an attraction. Thus, although in *The Unknown* war disability is absent in name, we are alerted to its referentiality through the excessive performance of Lon Chaney.

Laughter during wartime: comedy and the language of trauma in British cinema regulation 1917

MICHAEL HAMMOND

I heard a girl say the other day after the Somme film, when her companion was about to go before the end, 'Oh stay Jack, there's a comic film coming next'.

J.G. Legge, Director of Education, Liverpool¹

1 The National Council of Public Morals (NCPM), *The Cinema, Its Present Position and Future Possibilities* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1917), p. 39.

2 Susannah Radstone, 'Trauma and screen studies: opening the debate', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), p. 193.

3 Michael Hammond, 'The Big Show': cinema exhibition and reception in Britain in The Great War', unpublished PhD thesis, Nottingham Trent University, 2001.

At the end of her introduction to the series of short essays on trauma theory in *Screen*, Susannah Radstone expresses the hope 'that scholars will ask what trauma can illuminate whilst simultaneously bearing in mind the shadows it may cast over other theories, concepts and ideas no less valuable'.² This wish resonated with my own thoughts about work I have been doing on the cinema regulation debates that took place during World War I in Britain. My attention was drawn to these regulation debates as part of a larger project on the development of British cinema culture during 1914–18.³ This was primarily a reception study which sought to outline the discursive practices through which the industry, and official and quasi-official censoring bodies, conceptualized cinema audiences. Radstone's advisory comment concerning the 'shadows [trauma theory] may cast' rang true with my own methodological concerns in exploring a moment in film history situated at a time of national 'trauma'. However, rather than being concerned with revitalizing psychoanalysis or engaging directly with trauma theory, I want to explore its usefulness as an adjunct to reception methodology.

In an earlier piece, Radstone clearly outlines the distinction between 'psychoanalytic understanding of traumatic memory' and non (or anti) psychoanalytic approaches, which she terms 'trauma theories'.⁴ Trauma theories, she argues, assume a linear relation between traumatic event and symptom, and result in the construction of a binary external event/internal effect that rejects unconscious agency. On the other hand, psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the relationship between trauma, fantasy and memory where 'what is at stake in the formation of traumatic memory is the relation between the triggering second events and "the phantasies they activate"'.⁵ Her suggestion that trauma theory's appeal to disciplines that operate a 'memory/history opposition' offer 'a conceptual model of the relation between the inner world of memory and the external world of events'⁶ prompted me to reflect on the method of discourse analysis I employ. However attractive trauma theory as a model seems, its emphasis on passive subjectivity and 'victimhood' does not concur with the project of writing a history of cinema culture, characterized by interaction among participants as opposed to a top-down model of text/industry/censorship power over audiences. Further, trauma theory's insistence on a manichaeian external (villain)–internal (victim) structure converges with conceptions of the propagandistic practices inflicted upon a 'naive' public implicit in the popular memory of the Great War, which I sought to engage with by establishing a field of reception predicated on already existing performance traditions and audience expectation. By asking how audiences made sense of the films they saw at this time, it became necessary to consider signifying and sense-making practices in the wider realm of entertainment culture, which predated and coexisted with cinema. It became clear to me that the theme of the recreation and rejuvenating properties of public entertainment existed prior to the traumatic years of 1914–18 and that these were readily incorporated into the debate on cinema regulation, as well as in the advertising practices of exhibitors. The linear structure of trauma theory then, does not offer a usable method, since the traumatic moment and its effects were clearly registered publicly, which minimizes a 'latency' period. Trauma theory's emphasis on memory and history in this case would be more appropriate perhaps to a study of the public memory of the Great War in the twentieth century.⁷ My interest is in exploring the etiology of trauma and the stresses of everyday life in the discursive practices that underpinned debates on the social function of entertainment and, specifically, cinema. Trauma theory's efficacy in this regard is limited to offering a template for the way in which audiences were conceptualized within these debates. This is evident, perhaps paradoxically, in the debate concerning comedy films that took place in the testimony given to the National Council of Public Moral's Cinema Commission in 1916.⁸

4 Susannah Radstone, 'Screening trauma: *Forrest Gump*, film and memory', in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (London: Berg, 2000), pp. 79–107

5 Ibid., pp. 88–9.

6 Ibid. I recognize that not all trauma theory is counterpoised to psychoanalysis in this way. Cathy Caruth's work, for example, incorporates psychoanalysis in outlining a means of recovering the traceless trace of traumatic events. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

7 Adrian Gregory offers a study of this kind which utilizes the mourning theories of Kubler-Ross in his study of the history of Armistice Day up to the end of World War II. Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919–1946* (London: Berg, 1994). See Chapter 1, 'Lest We Forget: The Invention and Reception of Armistice Day'.

8 I use the term 'paradoxically' since Radstone in her introduction to the trauma debate notes how the 'emotional atmosphere in trauma panels (at conferences) excludes much of the cut and thrust of academic parrying and debate' Radstone, 'Trauma and screen studies', p. 189.

Within these debates there is a discernible trauma discourse related to wartime experience that is also an extension of a number of older concerns about the entertainment pursuits of the working class in general, and women and children in particular. Seeing these debates as evidence of an engagement with a perceived traumatized public, makes it possible to say something specific about the form and direction the public discussion concerning the regulation of cinema culture took, and how this led to its ultimate, albeit contested, acceptance as performing a legitimate social function.

Regulation debates prior to the war were characterized by a degeneration/regeneration polarity. They were structured by an unspoken assumption concerning the stressful impact of everyday life for workers and the poor. Both comedy and melodrama were seen as either evidence of degeneration or outlets for therapeutic release. This discourse became more acute during wartime when the structuring assumptions concerning the traumas of everyday life became more evident, and, in turn, acted as a displacement mechanism for war-related traumas. What is striking about these debates and their development is the level of anticipation of a traumatized populace, and the willingness of the trade to offer the cinema as a therapeutic space, that is clearly legible in the trade press and the NCPM report.⁹

In the quotation beginning this essay, the director of Education for Liverpool is responding to questions about the pros and cons of the impact of the relatively new entertainment form on British social life. The line of questioning in his testimony moves him towards accepting that cinema as recreation could be a positive experience for children. Asked by the Bishop of Birmingham if he would 'admit that the comic film is recreative although it may be vulgar sometimes', he responds, 'Yes, I feel forced to make that admission'. Legge's comparison of *Battle of the Somme* (Official War Film, 1916) with a comic film illustrates the extreme circumstances in which he felt it necessary to make such an admission.¹⁰ The transformational powers of the cinema were at the heart of the regulatory dynamic between the industry and official and non-official bodies at this time. The industry at the national level emphasized the positive social effects of cinema, which were primarily that it provided a new, safe and instructive social space where the options available to youth had previously been 'hooliganism in the streets', and to adults the public house.¹¹ In many respects, this was the industry's strongest argument. Cinema was a cheap form of entertainment available, through the general practice of the continuous programme, at accessible times throughout the day. The Saturday matinee, for example, occupied children while their mothers did the household chores. The counter-arguments and the concern of moral guardians and, to an extent, local governments, centred around the effects on social behaviour of the cinema's function as a public

9 NCPM, *The Cinema*.

10 *Battle of the Somme* depicted controversial scenes of the wounded and the dead and what is generally accepted to be a faked attack sequence in which soldiers are seen falling in action. There was considerable public debate concerning this film, although it was generally accepted to be an accurate and necessary depiction of the events that took place on the first day of the battle. See Nicholas Reeves, *Cinema, spectatorship and propaganda: Battle of the Somme* (1916) and its contemporary audience', *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television*, vol. 17, no 1 (1997), p. 23.

11 Nicholas Hiley, 'The British cinema auditorium', in Karel Dibbets and Bert Hogenkamp (eds), *Film and the First World War* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), p. 161.

space. The darkness gave ample opportunity for 'indecent'. Added to this were the physical effects, such as eyestrain and the impact on children's attention spans. The moral (or immoral) effect of the combination of the space and the subject matter of the films was of primary concern, and it was the 'sex films' and 'crook films' that drew the most attention.

Within these 'effects debates', the potential for physical and moral 'damage' was countered by the industry's emphasis on the potential for social health and moral uplift. The comic film occupied a secondary position in these debates; compared to the erotic nature of the society melodramas or 'sex films' and the violence of the burglary or 'crook films', comedy films were seen as a lesser threat. Often they were considered to be 'vulgar' but not 'indecent'. In the appendix to the NCPM report were written testimonies from the Chief Constables of most of the major towns and cities in Britain. The majority of these singled out the burglary film as the greatest threat, along with the cinema's attractiveness as a form of amusement, since apparently some of the juvenile crime was committed to gain the price of admission. The comedy film was, in the view of Guildford Constable, William V. Nicholas, at best 'frivolous' and ranked with 'bald melodrama mostly with impossible situations, and combined with a romance which is very often an insult to one's intelligence'.¹² In the view of many, the comic film exemplified the positive aspects of the transformational power of the cinema. This assumption drew on a widely-held belief in the necessary and recuperative powers of leisure for the working classes evident in Lady Bell's study of workers and their families in 1907. She illustrates this by reporting that: 'The resources provided for a man's leisure matter incomparably. It is during these that he may be ruined and dragged down, and not in the hours of work.'¹³ Her concern extended to the leisure of women and she gives a lucid account of a music hall audience's transformation:

There is no doubt that they come out looking pleased and brightened up. The kind of entertainment usually offered does not, to the critical onlooker, seem either particularly harmful or specially ennobling. The curious fact that, in almost any social circle, it makes people laugh convulsively to see anyone tumble down, is kept well in view and utilised to frequent effect.¹⁴

This observation illustrates the prevailing perception of the rejuvenating properties of leisure generally, and slapstick or knockabout comedy in particular. Lady Bell is careful to acknowledge the universal appeal of comedy and to place it somewhere between 'harmful' and 'ennobling'.

In the same spirit, Rev. A.J. Waldron wrote in to *Picture Palace News*, January 1916, in support of Sunday opening: 'Sunday should always be a rest and meditation day'. There was a pragmatic reason:

¹² NCPM, *The Cinema*, pp. 352-3.

¹³ Lady Bell, *At the Works: a Study of a Manufacturing Town* (1907) (London: Virago, 1985), p. 131.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-5.

- 15 'Sunday amusements by Rev R J Waterson'. *Picture Palace News*, 17 January 1916, p. 274

- 16 'Exit worry - enter picture'. *Pictures and Picturegoer*, week ending 27 March 1916, p. 538

- 17 'A remedy for all depression'. *The Bioscope*, 21 June 1917, p. 1219. The film *The Cure* was released in the USA by Mutual on 16 April 1917 and had its trade showing by June. The Mutuals were handled by the J.D. Walker company in Britain

- 18 Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, The Selig Collection, Folder 49

- 19 David Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (London: Collins, 1985), p. 147. Langford Reed was Chaplin's publicist in Britain

'only 5% of the population (of London) go to church . . . what about the 95% left?' Arguing for a healthy recreation that is 'free from anything that spells of white slavery', he recommends laughter and equates it with Christianity: 'Give people a chance to laugh and laugh purely, that is Christianity. When I think of the slums, the bare sordid horrible surroundings in which people live, I thank God that something is done on Sunday which gives them a chance to get out of their selves, to see colour, to imagine, to laugh to even - forget.'¹⁵

By 1916 this emphasis on 'forgetting' had an added significance for people who had personal stakes in the war effort. As the war progressed, the significance of the recuperative powers of cinema and the comic film became more evident in the advertising discourse of the trades and fan magazines. In 1916, *Pictures and the Picturegoer* encouraged fans to develop the 'cinema habit': 'The picture habit is the ideal panacea for the worries of life. It will not do your work or lessen your troubles; but it will assuredly brighten your existence, and take your minds from the worries of life'.¹⁶ A Bioscope review of Charlie Chaplin's Mutual film, *The Cure* (1917) pronounced the film 'an excellent tonic for all forms of depression'.¹⁷ In January of 1918 Percival Lee, manager of the Cinedrome in Torquay, wrote to the Selig Company about his audience's lukewarm reaction to their Civil War epic *The Crisis*: 'A nerve racked [sic] public are on the lookout for something a little less strenuous, a little more soothing and diverting'.¹⁸

The therapeutic qualities of entertainment in both the cinemas and the music halls provided the rationale for the benefit programmes. The returning wounded soldiers themselves were clear evidence of the physical cost of war, and within the wartime rhetoric they represented a debt that could 'never be repaid'. Cinema managers offered a community service in this respect. David Robinson cites Charles Chaplin's publicist Langford Reed's account of an occurrence where a wounded soldier is 'cured' by a Chaplin film. The General Manager of the United Picture Company of St Helens in Lancashire stated, 'Last week I was showing a "Charlie Chaplin", and a wounded soldier laughed so much he got up and walked to the end of the hall and quite forgot he had left his crutches behind'.¹⁹

The war and its publicly visible effects on soldiers' bodies complicated the discourses surrounding cinemas and the films they screened. The objections to the cinema's effect on young women and children did not apply to the returning wounded soldier or the soldier on leave and were conspicuously absent from the concerns expressed in the NCPM report. Army policy at the front had been to allow entertainments such as concert parties, where the men would put on their own shows, drawing primarily from music hall and pantomime. While at the divisional level these live entertainments were relatively mild, those at the brigade or battalion level were often very 'hot and strong'. J.G. Fuller has shown that these entertainments 'reinforced

- 20 J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 110
- 21 *Ibid.* p. 124

- 22 Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 21

- 23 Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory: Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 36

the soldier's habit of attempting to defuse the horrors of their situation through humour'.²⁰ Soldiers on leave, however, looked to the entertainments at home as a means of assimilating into their previous life. Fuller notes that the 'domestic music hall remained overwhelmingly popular as a resort for soldiers on leave'.²¹ Cinemas often allowed soldiers discounts on tickets in addition to providing special programmes for the wounded. The edifying properties of cinema were subsumed into a recuperative experience for soldiers, a harmless and necessary tonic to offset their experiences.

Comedy, either film or music hall, as a therapeutic device in public discourse might be thought of as a 'symptom' of traumatic experience in the private realm. Within the prevailing forms of information about the events at the front, the media, whether it was the popular newspapers or the official war films, by and large worked in tandem with the War Office. Joanna Bourke has suggested that because of this, 'personal correspondence between servicemen and their families and friends was much more important than public rhetoric'.²² In describing these informal layers of information with which the friends and families of those at the front had to manage, Jay Winter emphasizes the social practice of displacement: 'Fellow soldiers and voluntary organisations often spoke a different language, and communicated a surprisingly vivid and disturbing set of images of combat and death to people in mourning during the Great War'.²³

Comedy's position as a comparatively minor and secondary concern in the 'effects' debates about cinema, allowed it to perform a similar function by addressing these anxieties. Its perceived 'harmlessness', when compared to 'erotic' or 'crime' films, enabled the comic form to speak to these concerns, as entertainment, through the vernacular of existing comic traditions employed by performers and recognized by audiences. The effects of the war, social and/or physical, were part and parcel of the subjects of the comic sketches, songs and, of course, films. These did not need to take the war as their overt subject however. The comic subjects and characters which had been staples of cinema such as 'the naughty boy', 'the inebriate', 'the philandering husband', 'the courting couple', 'the park sketch' or 'the suffragette', were able to incorporate, and draw from, the significant social changes brought about by mass mobilization, conscription and the replacement of men by women in the workplace. In each of these cases, the function of comedy was to create order through disorder, to build on audience expectations and their understanding of comic traditions to make sense of the visibly changing world of everyday life.

In the terms of either trauma theory or psychoanalytic approaches to trauma, the rapidly changing social environment of Britain during the war years was a culturally traumatic event. It was the moment of events which were 'unthinkable' and it provoked, historically, a coping strategy of bringing already existing performance traditions

- 24 I am thinking here of the similarities between certain aspects of the popular memory of the Great War that emphasize a victimized and passive populace and Radstone's reading of 'paranoid conspiracy theories and passive fantasies in the reviews of *Forrest Gump* Radstone, 'Screening trauma', pp. 92-3

and regulating discourses to bear on the new situation. This constitutes evidence of the beginnings of a displacement filtered through a fantastic construction of a traumatized cinemagoing public. This could point to a need to revitalize the emphasis on fantasy offered by psychoanalysis. Certainly the public memory of the impact of the Great War is one replete with soldiers as victims.²⁴ However, in terms of the usefulness of the trauma debate in informing the method of my study, it may be that the language of trauma in cinema regulation debates requires not trauma theory, but an understanding of the homologies it shares with trauma theories which emphasize a linear temporality, and the impact of external causes on the inner self. In the debates on regulation, there is a clear sense of avoidance or displacement of traumas in the private realm by a dominant concern with the physical and moral affect of cinema. These similarities to trauma theories should prompt another question – one of reflexivity. Certainly, World War I as cultural memory has been produced by mechanical and electronic technologies across the century. At the meta-historiographic level it may be that the most useful tool of reflexivity in writing this history is the recognition that it is traumatic public memory which justifies/rationalizes the object history. On the micro-historical level, within the regulation debates there is a traceless trace, the symptomless symptom, which is hidden and therefore made visible, in the displacement of war-related anxieties onto the regulation of the filmgoing practices of women and children. The symptom 'presents' most completely in the fact that men (soldiers) were subject to a different kind of regulation, one which compensated for their experience of terrible events. In both cases the traumatic event unfolding is contained through recourse to already existing concerns in the case of women and children, and performance traditions of comedy in the case of soldiers. Trauma discourse in the regulation of cinema can be read as a fantastic (and ideological) construction of audiences by the industry and the censoring bodies at the moment of traumatic event. Failure to recognize the external cause/internal effect structure of these constructions, a structure they share with trauma theories, runs the risk of contributing to the conception of the Great War in popular memory that reproduces that very structure.

Imagination: Visual Culture and Identity in Britain since the 1940s

Tate Britain, London, 20–21 September 2002

ADRIAN HORN

Tate Britain's facilities and organization were of the highest standard and a setting more conducive to discussions of visual culture would be hard to imagine. The architecture and decor focused the mind on aesthetics and the whole gallery was buzzing with a public eager to catch the last few days of the Lucien Freud exhibition.

The conference set itself a broad remit for discussion. Its stated aims were to analyze 'the status and roles of the visual and visuality in relation to postwar patterns of cultural production and consumption, changing individual, group and class identities, shifting patterns of regional and economic wealth and the impact of postcolonialism'. Judging from the papers that I was able to attend, it achieved its aims admirably.

But what of the content? 'Discrete observations riddled with contradictions' was how David Mellor described his own opening plenary address. Titled 'Strictly Confidential', it set out to create a personal view of Britain's postwar cultural landscape. Mellor chose pictures from the contemporary public domain, which portrayed engagements with US cinema and photography. Indeed, he bombarded his audience with a plethora of images as diverse and 'anarchic' as 1960s anti-American art from *Oz* magazine, paintings from Francis Bacon's *oeuvre*, and George Lucas's advertising material for the *Star Wars* movies. This opening address contained so many ideas, formed through glimpses of thought-provoking images, that it appropriately set the scene for the various discussions

to follow. Many of the papers, and much of the tone of the conference, were concerned with what Mellor termed an 'anti-American phobia' in Britain.

Jessica Evans rounded off the first day with the second of the three plenary addresses, a 'work in progress' paper on 'Visual Culture and the Visual Turn'. She questioned the commonly held view that by the end of the twentieth century culture was becoming increasingly visual and that the culture of the visual had now become a 'total way of life', dividing the present from the past with new methods of image processing. In support of her argument against conventional wisdom on the modernity of visual culture, she presented an analysis of printed images using commercial, satirical and typographical examples from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Evans's address was based on her current research into *Hello* magazine, which, she concluded with reservations, is not new in its intrusive approach to celebrities but part of a historical continuum.

Rob Shields opened the second day with an address called 'The City is in the Eye of the Beholder', in which he contrasted perceptions of urban visual culture in the present with British 'neorealist' cinema from the 1950s and 1960s, looking at images of Northern cities taken from films like *A Taste of Honey*, *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner* and *Up The Junction*. Shields's address was full of questions concerning urban identities. He explored the idea that particular television shows seem able to capture the essence of identity: for example, *The Sopranos* captures the 'essence' of New Jersey, while *Coronation Street* conveys a unique Mancunian atmosphere.

The rest of the papers were divided into four strands 'North and South', 'Americanization', 'Whiteness' and 'Style Cultures'. These proved to be such closely entwined subject areas that papers presented in one strand might easily have fitted into another. This interchangeability was not necessarily a bad thing, but it did have predictable practical consequences, as delegates' dashes from one venue to another caused some minor disruptions and irritations.

The 'North and South' strand set itself the task of probing British stereotypical identities and exploring the complexities of visual representations of the North's regions against a background of negative terms such as 'anti-modern', 'socially disempowered' and 'economically disadvantaged'. In contrast, there was a clear intention to problematize 'southern' identities reflected in perceived positive terms like 'modern' and 'progressive'. Films, design, architecture, television, painting and sculpture provided the source material for an analysis of persistent myths centred on regional differences. The question to be addressed was how did a North-South divide become such an important part of English self-perception?

Charlotte Brunsdon's paper 'Cinematic Space and a Capital City:

London Films' traced patterns of London's representation through cinema by indicating periods of significance: the immediate postwar period, the 1960s and the 1980s. She linked these periods with key directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, who repeatedly engage with visual representations of London. Brunsdon traced changing cinematic representations of the capital by contrasting, for example, the 'ghostly' docks of the Ealing studio's *Pool of London* with the iconic parking meters of the 'Swinging London' films. Highlighting juxtapositions of wealth and poverty and pinpointing perennial city themes like 'a stranger's arrival', 'crowd anonymity' and 'the infernal metropolis', Brunsdon's paper explored distinctions between, for example, London and New York. Her discussion identified three broad areas – 'city themes and London stories', 'landmark London', and 'landscapes of loss' – within productions as diverse as Michael Winterbottom's *Wonderland*, Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* and Mike Leigh's *High Hopes*.

Christopher Breward's contribution to the North–South debate, like Brunsdon's, was focused on the capital. 'Space, Style and Subversion: New Edwardians in Postwar London' drew on a wide and fascinating range of primary source material on style, including contemporary sociological accounts, touristic literature, autobiography, fashion papers and film. Breward's use of the 1958 film *We are the Lambeth Boys* brought his discussion of London's working-class male fashion to life and anchored his presentation in the visual. Breward delivered an expert overview that observed 'the relationship between bodies, clothing and space'.

In 'Cultural Politics and Regional Mythmaking: North-east Artists, 1950–1970', Natasha Vall provided an examination of north-eastern coalminer artists from the 1960s such as Norman Cornish and Tom McGuinness, and the cultural influences involved in their work's reception. She argues that 1930s 'bohemian' values, 1960s cultural pundits and documentary photography may well have influenced this reception. Exploring themes like 'the aesthetic construction of "northernness" and the artist and critic's engagement with "metropolitan aesthetic imperialism"', Vall proposed that this has led to a style of self-parody reinforcing mythical perceptions of the North.

The 'Whiteness' strand repositioned the debate about race and nation by refocusing attention on the plurality of white identities. Mica Nava's enthralling paper 'White Women and Black Men: Epidermal Registers in 1940s Britain' was based on primary source material from between 1942 and 1945, and reworked previous research that she claimed had failed to appreciate the complex registers of meaning involved with the minority influx of Black GIs during World War II. Nava proposed that the influence of US popular culture in 1930s Britain had unexpected consequences, as contemporary ideas about the USA led to African-Americans

signifying, for the British, the perceived glamour of America, thereby transcending differences in skin colour.

Sean Redmond's paper 'Thin White Women in Advertising: Deathly Corporeality' looked at how ideas of 'purity', 'radiance' and 'innocence' are brought into advertising images through colour schemes and lighting effects. He suggested that the ideological operation of this visual product may be very different from its intention, in that it brings about 'skeletal visions of whiteness' perceived as 'death-like and destructive'. The alter-effect is evident where 'real' female readers are resistant to the thin white ideal in images, and their own eating habits, if not governed by an obsession with weight, may be viewed as resistant and 'counter-hegemonic'. Two clear representations then emerge in a life and death struggle between idealized feminine beauty and those of 'deathly (ghostly) corporeality'.

The purpose of the Americanization strand was to explore the complex and polarized way in which US culture was received in postwar Britain. The strand's objectives concerned an analysis of the resistance to and assimilation of US influences in what is now generally perceived as a negotiated visual culture.

Joe Kerr's paper on 'Automobile Cultures' was based on detailed research into landscapes created by the motor car and was part of a much larger project. He used 'new towns' in south-east England as case studies, exploring how these had been specifically designed around the everyday use of the motor car. He argued that, with hindsight, US influences were not as profound as might have been expected. Although Kerr's examples were highly specific, his analysis raised broader questions concerning an overuse of the term 'Americanization' in studies of cultural transmission. Kerr saw 'Americanization' not as the result of a cultural ascendancy of US design in Britain, but as a cultural hybridity in which US factors are only a part of a postwar architectural synthesis and rarely the dominant partner. From this he concluded that the historical interchange of cultural influences between the UK and the USA bear witness to a cross-fertilization resulting in a distinct Anglo-American discourse in urban planning, one that has been consistently overlooked in academic debate. This cross-fertilization stands in stark contrast to the French experience, where US influences have been feared for producing a dilution of native culture. This extreme attitude of the French was never, he suggests, replicated in Britain.

Addressing similar themes of US influences in design, Barry Curtis was concerned with 'American Surfaces'. Using images from science-fiction films, he drew attention to the 'perfect surfaces', with no visible joins or rivets, in cinematic portrayals of spaceships, arguing that 'surface skins and shells have figured in cultural theorizing as the "others" to depth, organs and substance'. US design in cinematic images exemplifies the perfection of the polished,

frictionless surface. By implication, Curtis suggested that in British life there was similar astonishment at imported images of modern surfaces available to the consumer from the USA, such as streamlining, plexiglass, nylon and prefabrications. British reaction to surface technology was polarized, it being perceived as either attractive or abhorrent, with no middle ground, as sections of the British population were subject to a national metaphor that plastic equals a lack of integrity and taste.

Affluence was the subject of David Heathcote's paper 'The Architecture of Affluence: the Americanization of Luxury', which proposed that in the years between World War I and the 1960s, the USA became less dependent on old-world signifiers of luxury and developed its own styles. In this respect his arguments ran broadly counter to those of cultural fusion. Heathcote saw a new style of luxury as being a predominantly classless concept of affluence. In architecture 'space' is the American luxury, epitomized in 'open-plan' living areas where informal leisure is exercised, unfettered by restrictive European dress codes. In Europe different rooms signified different activities and attire, whereas American 'open-plan' rooms encouraged no distinction in activity or in dress. The apparent simplicity and democracy of American luxury, though, was deceptive, as it required tremendous technical support and maintenance. For example, the swimming pool, a simple expression of wealth and easy living, required a large amount of back-up – 'a sense of extreme leisure supported on a vast raft of technical endeavour'.

An impassioned Mike Wayne rounded off the Americanization strand with a paper titled 'Exploring Britishness: the Allure of and Collusion with the Cultural Distortions of the American Film Market'. Wayne analyzed Hollywood's domination of British film distribution in the UK, which has led British filmmakers to adopt US perceptions of Britishness in order to access the UK home market. He argued that 'America has one of the most narrow, standardized and stereotypical views [of Britishness] in the world'. The effect of these standardized images is an economic not a cultural domination. British filmmakers are aware of economic reality and have been complicit in constructing and reinforcing these narrow stereotypes, in a process Wayne calls 'inverted cultural imperialism', because they want to do well in the US market. Costume dramas, gangster films and films of Northern grit, such as *The Full Monty* and *Billy Elliot* (both of which did well at the US box office) are typical of this tendency. A long discussion ensued concerning the British film market, about which most of the delegates seemed to have strong concurring views.

This stimulating conference succeeded in raising useful discussion around its central concern of the changing status of visual culture in postwar Britain. It made clear that both visually and culturally this

period has witnessed landmark shifts in aesthetics, commerce, cultural construction, gender representation and sexual politics, and that the mainstream has moved in surprising ways, provoking public reaction that is complex and often unpredictable. Because the speakers ranged from keynote figures with international reputations to PhD researchers, some of whom were speaking for the first time, many new lines of methodological approach and enquiry were followed, providing a refreshing and innovative intellectual atmosphere. This eclectic range of approaches was supported by the conference's inclusive nature, which set up an ambience that worked as a catalyst for searching discussion and constructive argument.

Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser (eds), *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press/Sacile: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto and the Cineteca del Friuli, 2001, 353 pp.

Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence, *Writing Himself into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences*. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2000, 288 pp.

Jane M. Gaines, *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era*. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001, 359 pp.

JOHN FULLERTON

Since the 1980s, when Thomas Elsaesser coined the phrase, 'the New Film History', it has been somewhat commonplace to observe that present-day historians of early film have engaged in rewriting the received history of early film, and have opened up territories hitherto unexplored. Central to this process has been the role film archives have played not only in finding and exchanging what had formerly been regarded as lost films, but also in restoring prints and making them more generally available. Nowhere has this process been more spectacularly showcased than at Le Giornate del Cinema Muto in Pordenone and, more recently, Sacile, where in the last twenty-one years the festival has played a central role in the discovery of our early cinema heritage. As part of that process of rediscovery, the 2001 retrospective of the festival featured the films of Oscar Micheaux and his circle, and screened two of the early Micheaux films – *Within Our Gates* (Oscar Micheaux, Oscar Micheaux Book and Film Company, Inc., 1920) and *The Symbol of the Unconquered* (Oscar Micheaux, Oscar Micheaux Book and Film Company, Inc., 1920) – films central to the re-evaluation of

Micheaux undertaken in the studies considered in this review. Unearthed at the Filmoteca Española in Madrid (where a Spanish-language version of *Within Our Gates* was found) and at the Cinémathèque Royale/Koninklijk Filmarchief in Brussels (where a French and Flemish distribution print of *The Symbol of the Unconquered* was found), both films, as all three studies considered in this review emphasize, are currently incomplete: little more than half of *The Symbol of the Unconquered* survives and approximately 75% of *Within Our Gates* remains. While concerns relating to the status of the restored prints should not be overemphasized, this concern becomes greater when prints, already subject to a variety of censorship inspections in the USA, are restored from intertitled versions prepared for foreign distribution. I return to this concern in my concluding remarks.

Oscar Micheaux and His Circle brings together a group of papers that were first presented at a conference at Yale University in January 1995. With a detailed filmography, prepared by Charles Musser, Corey K. Creekmur, Pearl Bowser, J. Ronald Green, Charlene Regester and Louise Spence, presenting comprehensive details regarding production, exhibition and reviews in the African-American press of Micheaux's 'pre-sound' films, and with an ambitious discussion of the development of research on Micheaux by J. Ronald Green, the anthology focuses on Micheaux's films and their relation to literary traditions, and restores attention to the contribution that other production companies made to the tradition of African-American filmmaking in the 1920s. In this latter context, Bowser's and Musser's discussion of films produced by the Maurice Film Company, based in Detroit, Michigan, highlights a company that was formally innovative in a film such as *Eleven P.M.* (circa 1929) and was different from its surviving counterparts in early race cinema. Musser also examines the Colored Players Film Corporation, a company, founded by European-American producer-directors in Philadelphia, that is noteworthy for its interracial and interethnic collaborations, perhaps best exemplified in *The Scar of Shame* (Frank Perugini, 1929) starring Lawrence Chenault, one of the Micheaux actors regularly employed by Colored Players (along with Charles S. Gilpin in one other production) to compete with Micheaux's films. One of the most intriguing discussions in the anthology is Gloria J. Gibson's consideration of the work of Eloyce Gist, an African-American filmmaker based in Washington, DC, whose short film, *Hell Bound Train* (circa 1930), gives expression to popular African-American religious faith. In elaborating the relation of film to other modes of popular expression, Gibson also examines ethnographic films shot in Florida in the late 1920s by the African-American anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston, and identifies an important area for further investigation in the vernacular tradition of African-American culture. With Charlene Regester's periodization

1 Javna Brown studies the fictional autobiography of Micheaux and presents him as a complex regionalist divided between the urban and rural African-American experience; Corey K. Creekmur considers the relation between Micheaux and novelist Charles W. Chesnutt, and Musser explores how Micheaux critiqued the underlying racial assumptions of three plays written by whites in *Body and Soul* (Micheaux Film Corporation, 1925), the film in which Paul Robeson made his first screen appearance.

of the reception the African-American press accorded Micheaux in the 1920s, and with studies investigating the literary context of Micheaux's films.¹ *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle* makes a broad-ranging contribution to the current diversity of research in African-American cinema.

Three contributors to *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle* whose research on Micheaux has not been considered so far in this review are, of course, Pearl Bowser's and Louise Spence's collaborative work, and the work of Jane M. Gaines. Represented by essays in *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle* – on, respectively, *The Symbol of the Unconquered* and *Within Our Gates* – these writers rework and develop their research in their more recently authored books. This review highlights two concerns which both volumes address, though in the case of Bowser and Spence these concerns are implicit, whereas in Gaines they are made explicit: the relation of their work to the academic discourse that has developed in film studies in the last thirty years, and the question of historical inference. Stating that their examination of Micheaux's 'pre-sound' film output (and several of his early novels) is conducted against the social and political history of popular culture in the African-American context, Bowser and Spence emphasize that their study is a reception-oriented history, one that speculates on the possible relations that obtained between a given film and its audience, a point of departure which both Bowser and Spence, and Gaines variously share. More specifically, Bowser and Spence in their Preface ask whether 'the resources and methods that have been developed over the past thirty years of academic film history and textual analysis illuminate early African-American cinema' (p. xxi). While they do not return to this question in their consideration of Micheaux's films, in discussing the history of the African-American reception of his films they engage with characterizing the social dynamics of the African-American community in the late 1910s and early 1920s. In this respect, both Bowser and Spence, and Gaines share similar aims and, in a number of instances, draw on the same source material to characterize reception. However, while both studies reconstruct the possible contexts of reception for Micheaux's early novels and films, Bowser and Spence – almost certainly in response to the question concerning the academic project of film studies – draw on what they term a 'Grand Narrative' to represent the horizon of African-American experience which Micheaux's films variously addressed and reanimated. While styling this reception context a 'Grand Narrative', they argue that their understanding of the concept differs significantly from Jean-François Lyotard's *grands récits* since it is based on the conviction that Micheaux's films strongly resonated with other texts (news stories, magazine articles, oral tales, songs, sermons, and other films) to provide a cumulative intertextual context in which Micheaux's films created a dynamic that helped audiences participate

in their own cultural politics (pp. 126, 132, 243 fn. 7) While Bowser and Spence privilege a detailed account of the growth of the African-American market for exhibition, and contrast the intertextual reception Micheaux's race films received in the African-American press (in *The Afro-American*, *Chicago Defender*, and *New York Age*) with Micheaux's own publicity and public persona, they emphasize the importance of race consciousness as a binding force in challenging the dominant culture's ordering of reality.

While confirming the centrality of the African-American experience in articulating this process, Gaines gives greater emphasis to the textual strategies that Micheaux used to secure emotional affect, arguing that his films drew on and reworked conventions in popular cultural traditions. Thus Gaines emphasizes the textual mechanisms that helped secure the process of identification, a process which she develops as a theoretical issue in its own right. Opening with a discussion of the process that underwrote James Baldwin's childhood identification with Joan Crawford and Bette Davis, Gaines goes on to critique the psychoanalytic accounts of cinema that were promulgated in the 1970s in the wake of the work of Christian Metz. In their place, Gaines advances a theorization of what may be characterized as a utopian sensibility which, drawing variously on Ernst Bloch and Richard Dyer, highlights some of the commonalities shared by white stage and film melodrama that informed the social uplift melodrama typical of Micheaux's occasionally Manichean representation of social dichotomies. In this respect, the non-representational aspects of film narration, Gaines argues, assume importance in generating that type of emotional affect which, on occasion, may promote the desire for social change. While grounding such discussion in the social context of reception similar to that characterized by Bowser and Spence, Gaines also advances an understanding that some of the formal elements in Micheaux's work – composition in depth in *The Brute* (a lost Micheaux film released in 1920) and the use of crosscutting in *Within Our Gates* – establish narrational protocols that Micheaux's cinema shares with (but also, in some cases, departs from) the classical paradigm. Allying this discussion with a consideration of censorship, and developing insights from Anne Friedberg's discussion of the social pathology implicit in film censorship, Gaines proposes that many of Micheaux's films were censored because of their potential to arouse strong emotional affect in the viewer. In this context, Gaines argues that the understanding of mimesis proposed by the anthropologist Michael Taussig may not only account for the moments of extreme drama in Micheaux's films, but help to explain why images can move spectators to the point that the desire for social change is stimulated. Such a theoretical position, Gaines proposes, helps to explain why censors, in the period

following the race riots in Chicago and elsewhere in the USA in 1919, were keen to exercise local censorship of Micheaux's films in an effort to curb the emotional power of his films and stave the desire for social change.

In sum, then, these are three compelling investigations that provide a variety of accounts of the reception of Micheaux's work in the African-American context. Given, however, that two of the films central to advancing research in this field survive in prints that were prepared for distribution outside the USA, one area of research that would seem ripe for investigation is the circulation and reception of African-American films in Europe in the 1920s. Let us hope it is not too long before research in this field is undertaken.

Gregory A. Waller (ed.), *Moviegoing in America: a Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, 351 pp.

Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood*. London: British Film Institute, 2001, 279 pp.

JAMES LYONS

Gregory A. Waller's *Moviegoing in America* joins Ina Rae Hark's recent *Exhibition: the Film Reader* (Routledge, 2001) in bringing together previously published work on film exhibition, and, like the latter book, provides much needed coverage for an area of inquiry notably short of such introductory texts. Like Hark's book, Waller's collection bears witness to the scope of research undertaken over the last twenty years into the history of film exhibition, but also proposes a rather wider remit for itself. Reflected in Waller's stated intention to generate a 'sourcebook' in the history of film exhibition and moviegoing, the collection sets out to 'open up, enliven, and complicate the cultural history of the movies', in the process seeking to consider 'how we think about the larger cultural history of film in America' (pp. 3–6).

These stated objectives are demonstrated clearly through the variety of material assembled for the collection, and most crucially, how that material is employed. Waller places academic essays alongside what he calls 'public documents' from the long history of US film exhibition. The sources for such documents are numerous, but include trade journals, theatre managers' handbooks, architectural magazines, and various mass market publications. The result is to capture some sense of the variegated public discourse on moviegoing in America across the century via the organization and deployment of these often contradictory perspectives on exhibition. In addition, Waller reserves space for fascinating scraps of exhibition ephemera.

such as the photo of a canned food drive outside a theatre screening *Tom Sawyer* in 1932, or the film schedule for New York City repertory cinemas from June 1981. The inclusion of such ephemera offers fleeting vignettes of histories of American moviegoing still to be written, and the desire to encourage directly such endeavour is evinced in the final section of the book, which provides an excellent guide to research and resources in the history of film exhibition and moviegoing, as well as a range of prospective research projects for students to pursue.

The book is divided into five parts, the first four of which assemble a range of the aforementioned public documents with one or two academic articles and a brief introduction. These four sections span the history of American cinema, dividing it up chronologically, and are also guided by discrete thematic and topical agendas. 'Capturing an Audience: Creating a Business: 1896–1916' opens with an essay by Charles Musser on the launch and rapid diffusion of the Vitascope in 1896–7, and a piece by Roy Rosenzweig on the moviegoing practices of blue-collar workers in Worcester, Massachusetts before the 1920s. These essays establish academic perspectives on questions of geographic and social mobility with regards to the cinema, which are then placed in tension with selected period documents. For example, the first section includes a number of excerpts from the trade magazine *Moving Picture World* (1908–11), which highlight concerns over the emerging shape of the exhibition business – one article offers advice to theatre owners on how to programme shows to avoid patronage by 'the rough and the vulgar' (p. 64). This calculated approach to the audience is contrasted with an account by journalist Mary Heaton Jones from the popular magazine *Outlook*, which seeks to offer an experiential, patron's-eye view of the moviegoing experience.

The second section, titled 'Palatial Palaces and Everyday Practices: 1916–1930' focuses on material pertaining to the picture palace era. Waller weaves excerpts from *Architectural Forum* together with selections from movie theatre manuals, contrasting treatises on building aesthetics with hard-nosed talk concerned with moving dollars into cash registers. He also touches on influential discourses from the time regarding anxieties over the child audience, reproducing sections from Foreman's *Our Movie Made Children* (1934) and reprinting Richard deCordova's essay 'Ethnography and Exhibition: the Child Audience, the Hays Office, and Saturday Matinees.' The skilful strategic juxtaposition of such material serves to engender a deeper sense of the complexity of the movie theatre at that time, and the ways in which it acted as a site for these imbricated commercial and social practices and discourses.

Part three, 'Picture Shows and New Theatres: the 1930s and 1940s', opens with Waller's own essay 'Hillbilly music and Will Rogers: small-town picture shows in the 1930s.' This exploration of

small-town theatrical exhibition in Kentucky provides an exemplary rendering of how the careful examination of the sort of period documents included in the collection can be used to generate rich perspectives on local practices which problematize general accounts of national trends, particularly, as Waller points out, in a period characterized by moves towards standardization in exhibition. On the other hand, Waller's discussion of the use of small-town theatres for the live performance of Hillbilly music in the 1930s illustrates the fact that the collection's selection of documents from the trade press, business manuals, and mass market periodicals can only scratch the surface of the history of the movie theatre as the locus for social activity – a history in which the projected image is sometimes far from view.

The fourth section of the book, titled 'Drive-In, Art House, Multiplex: the 1950s and Beyond', brings the collection up to the present, and 'explores developments and innovations in film exhibition since the 1950s' (p. 235). This time frame and remit demands a judicious choice of extracts, and Waller opens with John Belton's writing on widescreen cinema, enabling him to cover influential work on an important theatrical innovation, but also to foreground general issues of historiographic methodology. Dan Streible's essay on the history of the Harlem Theater in Austin, Texas provides a detailed mapping of black cinemagoing in one specific location over a fifty-year period, and his account allows the reader to see how the glorious innovations outlined by Belton squared with the economic realities of programming for a specific inner-city African-American community. Of particular note in the subsequent selection of primary documents is an excerpt from an article by Stanley H. Durwood, writing as President of American Multi-Cinema, Inc. in 1972. A prescient piece of prose, ending with the thought that 'we are convinced that the multi-theater concept ... will play a large part in the future of the motion picture business' (p. 281). Durwood's article provides an early enunciation of the relentless multiplexing logic that would shape theatrical exhibition in the USA over the next few decades, in particular the scrupulous attention to target markets, key demographics and the filling of concession coffers.

Overall, Waller assembles an impressive collection that should become a key resource in the teaching of film exhibition history. Given the book's slant towards classroom use, one could make a case for the inclusion of a dedicated section devoted to issues of methodology, but this perhaps understates the extent to which the collection leads by example.

Questions of methodology are certainly at issue in *Global Hollywood*, most explicitly in the opening chapter, where the authors launch a swingeing broadside at the current state of 'hegemonic US-UK screen studies' (p. 11). Noting that 'mainstream screen

studies is a blend of textual analysis, the psy-complexes and bourgeois business history', the authors charge this paradigm with failing to enable scholars 'to engage political and social history and social theory on the human subject, the nation, cultural policy, the law and the economy' (p. 13). As Waller's *Moviegoing in America* points out, there's more than one way to respond to screen studies' Holy Trinity. Their own inclination is to draw on approaches from critical political economy, cultural studies and cultural policy, with the particular aim of interrogating the global dominance of Hollywood.

Global Hollywood is driven by two key questions: 'Is Hollywood global – and in what sense? And what are the implications of that dominance' (p. 3). The book begins by laying out the evidence for the worldwide supremacy of US screen entertainment, in particular the fact that Hollywood doubled its proportion of the world market over the 1990s. Contending that 'the past decade has seen a truly foundational change' in the US screen industry's approach towards its export markets, the authors point out that such accelerated global dominance has been aided and abetted by the US government, which has worked aggressively to remove national barriers to trade. Despite hiding behind the rhetoric of free trade and free market economics, which would cast Hollywood's hegemony as the inevitable result of consumer demand for its product, the book notes that US government has in fact expanded its long-standing role in assisting the industry's international ambitions, for example flexing its muscles against South Korean screen quotas in 1998–99, and threatening industrial sanctions against Indonesia in response to anti-Hollywood protests by indigenous filmmakers (p. 47).

Arguably the most significant contribution made by the book towards an analysis of the global nature of Hollywood lies in its conception of the New International Division of Cultural Labour, or NICL for short. It is this notion, claim the authors, that allows for more than the 'thin description of Hollywood as an indexical sign of economic globalization', and can be used to map out the extent to which 'global Hollywood's imperatives are crucial to the contemporary political economy' (p. 18). Indeed, it is screen studies' inability to employ an approach adept at interrogating Hollywood's control of the NICL that leaves it wanting. Thus the authors beseech: 'enough teaching classes on animation, for instance, without reference to effects work, content analysis and the international political economy that sees an episode of *The Simpsons* decrying globalisation when the programme itself has been made by non-union animators in South-East-Asia' (p. 14). It is therefore to the hard facts of these socio-spatial power dynamics, and the analysis of the cultural policies that sustain the 'the smooth annexation of cultural labour' that *Global Hollywood* turns its attention (p. 33).

Chapters one and two of the book are devoted to establishing the historic, ideological and cultural coordinates of the NICL, the latter opening with Paramount Pictures' *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992) as an appositely emblematic example of the complex transnational flows guiding cultural production under the NICL. An official British/French/Spanish co-production brought to the screen by 'co-production protocols . . . among more than 135 bilateral and multilateral treaties between over eighty-five countries outside the US', *1492* was an EU response to US screen hegemony that ironically 'enable[s] the very NICL that ratifies it,' depending as it did upon cheap location shooting and labour in Costa Rica (p. 45).

Chapter three, titled 'Co-producing Hollywood', explores international co-production in more detail as a 'product of, and response to, the NICL and these increasingly monstrous barriers to entry in the screen industries' (p. 83). Of particular note here is the case study of Canal Plus, which flourished during the climate of broadcasting deregulation and privatization in Europe during the 1990s. The result has been evident in the company's equity co-production agreements with Hollywood studios, and which beg difficult questions regarding the diversity and distinctiveness of European cultural production under such conditions. Chapter Four, 'Hollywood's Global Rights', examines how 'Hollywood uses intellectual property (IP) law to facilitate its international profile' (p. 111). With copyright industries emerging as one of the most lucrative sources of US export earnings, attempts to enforce US copyright ownership in the face of global piracy have become of paramount importance. The authors' suggestion that 'fair use' rights should be extended to digital textual ownership, thus abrogating certain definitions of piracy is as admirable as it is unlikely, but nevertheless brings into high relief the complex issue of readers/viewers prerogatives with regards to the new technologies of digital convergence.

Chapters Five – 'Distribution, Marketing and Exhibition' – and Six – 'Audiences' – deal with the selling of screen commodities and the audiences to which they are sold. These contributions provide shrewd critiques of the screen industry's global marketing and distribution strategies and the implications of trends in consumer surveillance. If they lack some of the punch of the previous chapters, it is perhaps, as the authors note themselves at one point, because they represent the prosaic end of the NICL, a fact which also serves to smooth their functioning. Ultimately, *Global Hollywood* is a valuable book that deserves serious reading. It is at its most powerful when laying bare the restrictive cultural policies that sustain the NICL, and it mounts a persuasive case for the need to 'confront the NICL and imagine alternative, more salutary conditions and possibilities for our own cultural labour and for our brothers and sisters in the culture works everywhere' (p. 216). When read alongside *Moviegoing in*

America it provides a compelling sense of the range of work that needs to be undertaken in order to more fully realize the past, the present and our role in the future of Hollywood as an industrial apparatus.

Dimitris Eleftheriotis, *Popular Cinemas of Europe – Texts, Contexts and Frameworks*. New York, NY and London: Continuum, 2001, 232 pp.

CATHERINE FOWLER

1 Duncan Petrie (ed.), *Screening Europe: Image and Identity in Contemporary European Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1992).

2 See, for example, Ginette Vincendeau (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of European Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1995); Jill Forbes and Sarah Street (eds.), *European Cinema: an introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); Wendy Everett (ed.), *European Identity in Cinema* (Exeter: Intellect Books, 1996).

3 The full list includes *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (Pedro Almodóvar, Spain, 1988), *Chocolat* (Claire Denis, France 1998) and *Passion* (Jean-Luc Godard, France/Switzerland, 1982).

4 Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *Popular European cinema* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1994).

5 Natasha Durovicova, 'Some thoughts at an intersection of the popular and the national', *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 34 (Fall 1994), pp. 3–9.

6 Iris Marion Young, 'The ideal of community and the politics of difference', in Linda Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism, Postmodernism* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 300–23.

Back in 1991 the National Film Theatre in London hosted a conference focusing on the question of how European films were shaping, and being shaped by, the dramatic changes taking place in Europe. Some of the proceedings were published as *Screening Europe – Image and Identity in Contemporary European Cinema*.¹ Using films such as *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, UK, 1991), *Time of the Gypsies* (Emir Kusturica, Yugoslavia, 1989), and *Edward II* (Derek Jarman, UK, 1989) writers contemplated visions of an extremely diverse 'European cinema'. Despite the subsequent publication of various books on cinema with 'European' in the title,² Dimitris Eleftheriotis is the first author really to engage with the vision presented in *Screening Europe*. His intention to do so is evident in his title – not 'Popular European cinemas' but 'Popular cinemas in Europe'. What Eleftheriotis shares with many of the filmmakers discussed at the 1991 conference³ is a scepticism about the term 'European cinema' where, in critical terms, 'European' actually hides a division into nation states (see Richard Dyer's and Ginette Vincendeau's collection⁴ which proved that 'in being 'European' a cinema is [paradoxically] Finnish, Italian, Polish, even Soviet')⁵ and in industrial terms it brings about a dilution into 'a future in which cinema's specificity is lost within a general audio-visual sector of convergent media' (p. 22).

Avoiding these two tendencies, Eleftheriotis constructs his geographic framework along the lines of philosopher Iris Marion Young's city, 'as a place to enact a politics of difference'.⁶ encompassed by him in the phrase 'similarity in difference' (p. 52).

The connection between films is therefore constructed like Young's descriptive concept, the 'being together of strangers';⁷ this allows him to bring films together to emphasize external relations while keeping their internal differences intact. The book has eight chapters: 'Europe and the European film', 'National Cinemas', 'Identity, Difference and Cultural Exchange', 'The Popular and the European in Film Studies', 'Genre Criticism and the Spaghetti Western', 'Issues of Authorship and the Case of Lina Wertmüller', 'Gender, Sexuality and Mediterranean families', and 'Exhibition: the Apparatus Meets the Audience'. As should be clear from these titles, each engages with a specific critical framework and then, through its particular choice of text or context, contests it. In all the chapters Eleftheriotis's choice of films is original and effective, and textual analysis is one of the book's real strengths. However the self-contained format of the chapters – chosen no doubt to facilitate the textbook function suggested by the book's subtitle – impairs the accumulating argument that is present (and, for me, pressing) in the background.

Most indicative of this pressure is the fact that one of the book's most exciting claims appears only in the final chapter, within the last fifteen pages of the book. This is the idea of a form of 'looking around' that Eleftheriotis links to the interrupted spectatorship of open-air theatres where, he observes, the audience's tendency to 'look around' necessarily ruptures the mastery associated with the apparatus. A very different form of viewing, also associated with different kinds of popular films, is thus described here. Eleftheriotis takes his notion of 'looking around' further, suggesting that it can also be used to encapsulate aspects of popular cinemas in Europe which show: 'an awareness of surrounding . . . people, cultures and discourses' (p. 195). His term 'looking around' comes as a revelation at the end of a book, which, in retrospect, is all about this mobile, interrupted, and multiple way of seeing things.

Had the last chapter come at the beginning of the book, 'looking around' could have been connected to two tendencies present throughout: travel and impurity. First, the notion of travel works on various levels, from films that have themselves travelled, across Europe (the Gendarme popular in France and Italy), across to the USA (Lina Wertmüller's films), or back from the USA (the Italian spaghetti westerns), as well as films that feature travel in their narrative (*Mediterraneo* [Gabriel Salvatores, Italy, 1991], about Italian soldiers stranded in Greece during the second world war; *Until the End of the World* [Wim Wenders, Germany/France/Australia, 1991], a road movie and *Bhaji on the Beach* [Gurinder Chadha, UK, 1993], effectively about diaspora in Britain). Second, the notion of 'impurity' is used, in relation to work such as that of Wertmüller – 'The political impurity of her films is seen as existing in parallel with a number of generic, stylistic, textual and thematic

8 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 34, quoted in Eleftheriotis, *Popular Cinemas of Europe*, p. 50

impurities' (pp. 140–41) – and to the generic hybrid spaghetti western.

In travelling, crossing boundaries, mixing up art and the popular, the national and international, cultures and aesthetic categories, each of these case studies is practising a relational methodology that the phrase 'looking around' strikingly encapsulates. However, impaired by the need to provide a textbook guide to, as well as a contestation of, the area, Eleftheriotis's most significant intervention must remain in the background.

Along with his revelatory final chapter, his third ('Identity, Difference and Cultural Exchange') and fifth ('Genre Criticism and the Spaghetti Western') are perhaps the most impressive. Cultural exchange is the subject of his discussion of *Mediterraneo*, *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Underground* (Emir Kusturica, France/Germany/Hungary, 1995) Beginning with Homi K. Bhabha's distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference – the first being static ('culture as an object of empirical knowledge')⁸ and the second more fluid and dynamic – he argues for a view of cultural exchange that does not rely on binary oppositions such as similarity and difference, home and away, the nation and its others, but instead recognizes that all of these are 'positional and political' (p. 52). *Mediterraneo*, in which the encounter of Italian soldiers with the inhabitants of a Greek island operates along touristic lines and therefore within some of the oppositions above, is compared with Chadha's and Kusturica's films in which difference is understood and complicated. Having acknowledged their competing agendas, histories and contexts, Eleftheriotis then compares the role that water plays in each, from *Mediterraneo* set on an island, through *Bhaji* about a trip to Blackpool, and *Underground* in which a final fantasy sequence has the characters emerging out of the waters of the Danube. The fluidity of Bhabha's cultural difference is imaginatively linked here to water, which 'seems to reproduce this dynamic relationship between similarity and difference, union and separation' (p. 63).

One of the key assertions of chapter three is the suggestion that diversity and difference can be analyzed within the nation, therefore doing away with terms such as inside/outside. The chapter on spaghetti westerns also engages with national cinema debates, though on this occasion seeks the national in the popular (rather than in art cinema) while at the same time suggesting a 'transcultural and transnational understanding of national cinema' (p. 126). Eleftheriotis undertakes here a detailed comparison of the openings of several spaghetti westerns with that of *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956, USA). Through this he convincingly argues that in spaghetti westerns the hero is represented as more transcultural than in the classic western where he 'embodies and resolves ideological tensions and contradictions' (p. 128) and is therefore innately tied to notions of American masculinity. In addition, he suggests, the traditional

blankness of spaghetti actors – who often took American names – and spaghetti heroes – often played by different actors – goes some way towards an erasure of the national in these films. In a reversal of the viewpoint that has suggested that too frequently US depictions of Europe end up as exoticized misrepresentations, Eleftheriotis suggests that in fact

the textual practices of [spaghetti westerns] disentangle the position of the hero from the context of American cultural and historical specificity and by liberating this position they are able to offer it as a place from which you can experience the Wild West without buying into the American myth. (p. 129)

Here again, we have the ‘awareness of surrounding . . . people cultures and subjects’ encapsulated by the phrase ‘looking around’ as Italian spaghetti westerns are viewed across the boundaries of the nation.

Popular Cinemas in Europe is quite an achievement. It considers a wide variety of films, national and historical contexts that have seldom been considered, it engages with and problematizes many of the concepts that European cinema studies has held dear; and it manages to offer, in its idea of ‘looking around’, a crucial intervention in debates about exhibition, popular cinemas in Europe and theorizations of national cinemas. Unfortunately the latter does not get the emphasis it deserves, since it has to compete with the introduction to ‘texts, contexts and frameworks’